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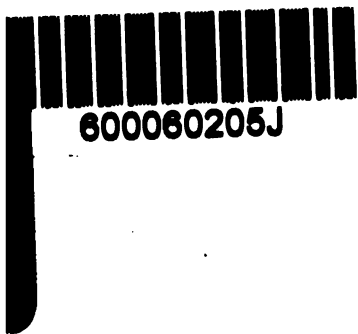
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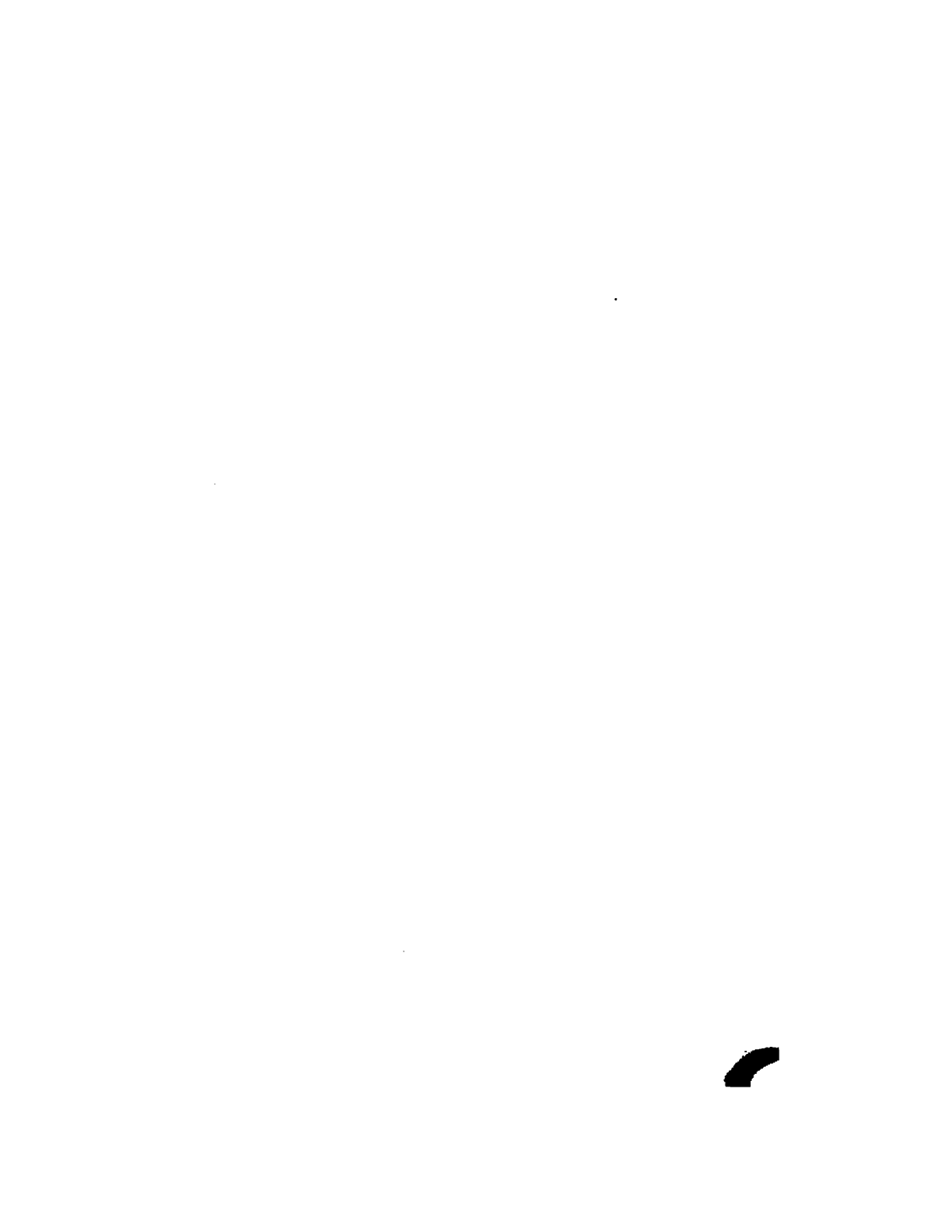
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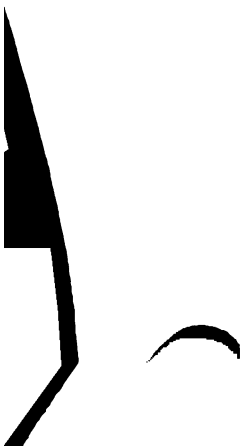
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CRUEL LONDON

J. Nobel.

BY

JOSEPH HATTON,

AUTHOR OF

'CLYTIE,' 'THE QUEEN OF BOHEMIA,' 'THE VALLEY OF POPPIES,'
'CHRISTOPHER KENRICK,' 'IN THE LAP OF FORTUNE,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

BOOK IV.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. MARTYRS AND VICTIMS IN PEACE AND WAR	1
II. VISIONS OF FORBIDDEN LOVE . . .	26
III. THE AWAKENING	49
IV. FALLEN AMONG THIEVES	72

BOOK V.

I. ON BOTH SIDES OF THE CHANNEL . . .	93
II. "THE TRAIL OF THE SERPENT" . . .	120
III. MISS WEAVER'S RETREAT	154
IV. A DECLARATION OF WAR	180
V. THE FIGHT BEGINS	189
VI. WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN	200
VII. MR. FITZHERBERT ROBINSON WANTS A HOUSEKEEPER	222
VIII. THE GARRISON MAKES A SORTIE . . .	237

CONTENTS.

BOOK VI.

CHAP.	PAGE
I A WORLD OF SNOW AND TWO LOVERS .	253
II. USELESS TREASURES	277
III. FIGHTING THE TEMPEST	289
IV. "FACES IN THE FIRE"	311

BOOK IV.

CRUEL LONDON.

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

MARTYRS AND VICTIMS IN PEACE AND WAR.

FROM a luxurious home in the Southern States of America, to a fugitive existence in a country desolated by war; from penury in New York to a happy home on the hill-side of a smiling valley in old England: these were changes which represented strange experiences in a young girl's lifetime. Caroline Virginia Denton, whom two years ago we saw standing by

her father's side, on that ocean steamer leaving the harbour of New York, had gone through all this in a few short years, and we encounter her, still a girl (though exercising the duties of womanhood), at a picturesque house called "The Cottage," overlooking the peaceful valley of Essam on the Avon.

In the rare summer setting of the English meadows, The Cottage was a gem of architectural simplicity. Sitting on the green lawn, Caroline Denton, now Mrs. Philip Gardner, looked like some Oriental flower transplanted into an English garden. Less than the middle height, her figure was slim and dainty. She moved with an indefinable gracefulness. Her face, her hair, were southern in type and character. Dark, with the glowing radiance of health, there was a world of softness and beauty in her eyes. They were black as night, and tender as opening buds in spring. Her hair had a tinge of raven-


blackness, and there was a wavy luxuriance in its folds. When she looked at you, the dreamy softness, the pathetic happiness of the face touched you. If you tried to read it you would say there was a void in the woman's heart ; a sense of a mission unfulfilled ; a mind that had its sorrowful secret, nursed in musing hours of loneliness ; a longing for something undefined. When she smiled it was the sun breaking through a rain cloud ; when she laughed it was the sun at noon, bright, clear, jocund. But she rarely laughed, except at the play of an infant, her first-born, which would wile away her time by lamb-like gambols on the grass. Mrs. Gardner of England, the Caroline Virginia Denton of the Southern States of America, was a contrast to Jane Crosby, unlike her in every feature, as she was different in appearance, thought, manners, feelings, from the Sleaford girls at Fitzroy Square. She was womanly to a fault,—trusting, con-

finding, self-sacrificing, gentle, made to be loved,—a beautiful creation, worthy of the Miltonic eulogium.

Clad in a cream-coloured dress of soft linen, with a bit of crimson ribbon round the throat that heightened the rich brown depth of her complexion, she was sitting in the shade of an elm by the summer-house at The Cottage, with a long bend of the valley before her, the placid river separating her from the little town of Essam, with its lichen-tinted stone houses, its church tower among the elms, and its ruined abbey in the distance—a crumbling reminiscence of mitred abbots, superstitious kings, and battle-fields long since effaced by waving corn and thick green grass.

It was the joyous summer time. The valley pulsated with a never-resting but peaceful life. The dragon-fly poised its shimmering wings on the hedges down by the river. The lark was singing some-


where in the sky. The air was full of a mysterious, lulling, somnolent music. A thousand bees were busy in the budding limes. The perfume of the flowers tried in vain to compete with the scent-laden breeze that had kissed the swathes of newly-mown grass. Beneath the shadows of a willow-clad bend in the river, water-lilies invited the butterfly to come and rest in their yellow bosoms. Now and then the murmuring silence would be disturbed by the plunge of a rat taking a mid-day swim; or the splash of a fish tempted from his retreat by some gaily tinted fly. In the hayfields, flocks of young birds were trying their newly-fledged wings. The swallow sailed in curve and circle overhead. The mowers were resting in the shade, eating their frugal meal of cheese and salad, and passing round the yellow cider. The merry laugh of children at play came up from some hidden copse in the valley;



and a summer haze hung about Essam, giving its gables, towers, and trees the delicate appearance of a soft poetical drawing against the sky, unreal in its very natural reality, a dream of old houses, a passing fancy of elms and crows, of ruined abbeys and square church towers.

No wonder the heart of the woman to whom all this appealed in a thousand sympathetic ways was touched with its poetry; no wonder the soul melted in tender thoughts of the past, and in present love for the little one that lay asleep in her arms.

“Ah, my darling,” she said, in a voice of musical sweetness, “all this is indeed beautiful; you are born in a land of loveliness; not so glorious in its tall grasses and its great shadowy leaves, its mighty savannahs, as your mother’s native land, but more beautiful in its sweet repose, its calm old ways, its nestling towns



on river banks, and its everlasting greenness."

She was not looking at the child. Her eyes rested on the towers and gables of Essam.

"It is all like a dream ; I sometimes think I am sleeping through a long, long fancy ; and that I shall wake again in my once beautiful home among the cotton-fields, with the songs of the negroes coming up from the plantation. And then there is a troubled time, the tramp of soldiers, the hurrying of feet, the roar of cannon ; great fires flash, and the clouds of smoke go up to the sky ; then a weary flight on horseback, in rattling waggons, in boats at sea ; and a time of poverty, of proud starvation ; of a widowed father—old, sad, worn—longing to quit a land accursed, once so sweet and sunny, a country once so beautiful.

‘ Maryland ! My Maryland ! ’ ”



She tried to sing the touching lines, and burst into a flood of tears. The child slept on, though the hot, agonizing drops fell upon its face. She bent down and kissed the pouting, cherry lips. They parted into a smile, as if the mother's touch had awakened happy dreams in the infant's slumbers.

"I'm very wicked, Willie," she said, "but it is not wrong to wish your grandfather could have lived to see you. William Graham Denton! That's your name, little one; it was his. May you be as good and fine a man! May your fate be cast in happier lines! To travel all this way in the hope of eventually laying his bones quietly and peacefully among strangers; and to be killed on landing. Oh, cruel, cruel fate! It makes me feel wicked, Willie, in spite of that soothing song the river is singing down Tristram Decker would have to hear that music. Who was he?"

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Poor Tristram, he was a Federal officer, quite young, and altogether unlike the others who fought against the dear, martyred South; but your grandfather wouldn't forgive him. If men who go forth to slay each other only knew the true and noble hearts first, before they pierce them! Sometimes I think it is all wrong; that God has left His beautiful world to its fate, and no longer lifts His hand to protect the good or to punish the wicked. Ah, but you should have seen your grandfather! what a fine handsome man he was, —tall and straight, with white hair. He was a king at home. I have often thought he was not himself in these latter days. He would talk to me for hours, as I am doing now to you, and he came to England, and brought me here without an object, without a plan, without any arrangement of any kind. He said we were journeying to the new Jerusalem, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the home of our fathers,

where we would find out their memorial tablets in grey old churchyards. Ah, Willie, he was a great man once, with hundreds of slaves, with lands that stretched as far as the eye could see, with a great house twenty times as large as The Cottage, with shady verandahs about it; he was more of a king than an English monarch, and I was as gay and bright as yonder butterfly, as free and joyous as those swallows. They burnt that house down, and all the huts and cottages. Our servants fled. We had nowhere to rest the soles of our feet; and we could never more sing,

‘Maryland! My Maryland!’”

A young man, familiar to the reader as Tom Sleaford, but only known to the woman as Philip Gardner, sauntered from the cottage door and stood for a few minutes looking at her before she saw him. He was dressed in a light

boating jacket and trousers. He had, since we last met him, grown a beard and started an eye-glass. He put the foppish thing to his eye, and looked at the girl-like mother and her infant.

"Talking to yourself again," he said presently, in a tone of reproach.

"Ah, Philip!" she exclaimed, with pleased surprise; "I thought you had gone to London."


"I'm not going up till to-morrow," he replied, carelessly.

"Oh, I am very glad. Hush, don't wake the baby; I will take it to Susan."

She got up, lifting her infant load lovingly, and went into the house.


The Cottage was far more pretentious than its title would denote. It was an old-fashioned house, covered with creepers and nestling among trees. It was surrounded by a garden which, closed in at the back, broke away from walls in the front, where it ran into lawns, flower-beds,

and clumps of foliage, ending in a sunk fence, beyond which, down to the river, The Cottage estate stretched in undulations of meadow lands dotted with sheep. The Cottage, house, farm, and estate, formed one of the prettiest little properties in all the vale of Essam. It had been purchased some three years ago from its former owner by a local agent for Mr. Philip Gardner, who was understood to be a gentleman of means. He had bought it as it stood, furniture, stock, and everything, and paid cash down on the nail. The curiosity about the new owner had nearly died out before he appeared. It was nine months before he came, and he did not call upon anybody. It was understood he had a wife. A lady was with him, at all events, —a loud, showy woman. They did not go to church. The rector called twice, but on neither occasion could he see the master or the mistress. A gay boat appeared on the river, and the loud laughter of more



than one vulgar woman was heard in the evening as Mr. Gardner rowed them to the boat-house which he had built opposite his estate. Mr. Gardner was no other than Tom Sleaford, and The Cottage on the Avon will explain his regular though somewhat mysterious weekly absences from town. He had invested in this estate during Squire Kerman's merry days in London; he owned it before the Cemetery Company came to grief; he was its devil-may-care master, with plenty of money at his banker's when he used to pretend to Kerman that he was short of cash.


The Asphalte Company was a flourishing concern; so was the Northern Ironworks, which he had bought and turned into a limited company. Old Sleaford had not the faintest idea of the money Tom had made; and Tom had not the faintest idea of letting anybody know what he was worth. To avoid suspicion, and with a view to protection against



reverses, he had bought The Cottage estate in an assumed name. In London he was Tom Sleaford; at Essam he was Philip Gardner, but he was very rarely seen by his neighbours. They did not think him worth knowing. The kind of life which had inaugurated the Gardner reign at The Cottage was not calculated to make a good impression on local opinion. Indeed, it was whispered over Essam tea-tables that the flaunting, vulgar lady they called Mrs. Gardner was not his wife at all, and that the lady visitors who came there were no better than they should be.

A change had, however, come over the scene when, some two years ago, a pretty, foreign-looking girl began to be seen in the gardens, or driving along the highways. There had been quite a flutter in the church with the old square tower when she appeared in The Cottage pew, which had been vacant so long. The strict families of the town resented the intrusion; and

the rector had been informed that he must really inquire into the position and character of the lady. He had done so with politic care and discretion. Meeting Mr. Gardner at the station, he had entered the same railway carriage, and led up to the subject with clerical deftness. Mr. Gardner had been perfectly frank with him. "Quite right that you ask the question," he had said; "pray don't apologize. I have led a free life, but I have sown my wild oats. I am really married, and the lady about whom you are so complimentary is my wife, an American heiress. It is very good of you to say that under these circumstances Essam and the county society are open to us; we don't care for society; we have reasons for living quiet and retired, and I trust you will let us have our way, or I shall sell The Cottage and go somewhere else. All my time is occupied in perfecting an invention on which I have spent many years; when



that is done I shall be rich enough to buy all Essam and the county too, and then, Mr. Rector, I hope to be a worthy and a liberal parishioner."

Mrs. Gardner, the pretty American, had, therefore, been permitted to go about without social molestation, and to attend church without comment, except as to her bonnets and dress. Not that Essam and the county cared to break in upon the privacy of The Cottage. They did not believe much in Mrs. Gardner. She was too pretty to be very good, certain of the ladies said. Moreover, the Gardners were up at all hours of the night, Mrs. Gardner dressed in such out-of-the-way style, and all the men who chanced to meet her were in such raptures about her! She sang songs on a Sunday, and had been seen by people as they were going to afternoon service, painting at an easel fixed up in the meadows. There was something weird and foreign about

the woman, and Essam society preferred to give her a wide berth; though the people whom she had to meet once in a way were courteous to her more from fear than respect, for she had an imperious manner, an air of authority, the habit of being obeyed, which quickly put down any thought of insolence in man or woman. Nevertheless, Mrs. Gardner continued to be a mystery to Essam; and for herself it may be said that she lived a dreamy life, the reality of which she often doubted, sitting, as we see her now on summer days, talking to her infant in a half forgetful, wandering manner, which did not please Mr. Sleaford, *alias* Philip Gardner.

"You're always muttering and talking to yourself," said Tom, when she came back to him.

"Am I, dear?" she said, her great black eyes turned towards him.

"Am I, dear? Yes," he said.

"I think I was talking to the baby."

"It's the same thing. I don't like women who talk and mutter to themselves."

"You said I was not to talk to the people at Essam, dear, nor to the doctor, nor to the minister; and as you are only here two or three days a week, I suppose I have got into the bad habit that way."

"I didn't mean you were not to talk exactly; you ought to know what I meant."

"Yes."

"Yes," he repeated, mockingly. "Don't say yes in that silly way, as if you were a child. You know what I mean well enough. I don't want people talking about our affairs, gossiping and chattering about my business, what I do, where I go."

"Don't be angry," said the woman, timidly, linking her arm in his. "I never talk about our affairs; and as for

what you do or where you go, I can't talk, because I don't know."

"You want to know; that's what's the matter."

"Not if you still object, love. But you promised to take me to London this summer, and show me the fine English ladies riding and driving in the Park; and I do so long to see London."

"You know what befel Eve. Her curiosity ruined both herself and her husband."

"But my curiosity is very mild, Philip. I don't want to hear anything more than you wish to tell me, and I have never seen any more of England than this."

"And isn't this good enough for you?"

"It is very beautiful,—so may a bird-cage be; but the occupant may get tired of seeing the same bars, however beautiful, for ever."

"Oh, you're tired, are you? Very

well, I will sell The Cottage and we'll go somewhere else."

"Now, my dear Philip, don't say that."

"I find you a stranger, without a friend, without a home; I bring you here, I give you all a man can, and you are discontented."

"No!" exclaimed the woman, with something like a rebuke in her eyes.

"You hadn't a penny in the world. You have money in your purse, every luxury. You repay me with ingratitude."

She took her arm away from his and stood still, her eyes flashing, the colour leaving her olive face.

"Don't say that; I can't bear it. And I was not penniless, Philip."

"I will say it. I say you refuse my kindness with ingratitude."

"And I say you are cruel to say so."

"Cruel!"

He repeated the word with a sneer.

"Cruel and unmanly," she said, her lip quivering.

"Thank you."

"Is this the way English husbands treat their wives, in return for love, devotion, the sacrifice of every thought and wish? Do you taunt them with the money you allow them, the food they eat?"

"Go on. I thought it would come out at last, all this talking to yourself. We'd better have it out."

"Yes, in Heaven's name, let us, for my heart is bursting. For months past you have flung my poverty in my face, not openly as you have to-day, but by inference in little ways. I can't bear it. You will make me hate you."

"Well, upon my soul, that's nice. And is this the way American ladies treat their husbands, since you are making comparisons between the two countries?"

She made no reply.

"Go on, say all you think; don't mind me."

She flung herself upon the grass, and burst into tears.

He lifted her up, and carried her to the rustic seat where he had found her talking to their child. She sobbed bitterly. Her delicate frame trembled. She looked at him with a face full of passionate upbraiding.

"Now, I hope you'll be better. I've been expecting this for months. I knew the storm was brewing when I saw you talking to yourself again."

"There was no storm," she sobbed. "My heart was full of love and tenderness."

"Was it? Then it's a pity your heart should falsify your tongue."

"Don't talk to me in that cold way; you will drive me mad."

She sobbed between every word, and the tears rained down her face. Yet a

lark was singing overhead, and the sweet perfume of flowers played around her, breathing of nothing but love and peace.

“ You don’t expect me to speak to you affectionately after what you have said ? ”

“ Then go away,” she exclaimed, leaping to her feet. “ Leave me, if you have a heart that neither tears nor anguish can touch.”

She flung back her hair that had half fallen upon her shoulders, and stood before him with her eyes flashing, her white teeth gleaming between her parted lips.

“ Philip Gardner, my husband, the only person—man or woman—whom I can call friend in England, the only person who knows me, I have striven to think of no one else, I have put all the world aside but you, to you and to our little one I give the entire confidence of my heart ; I want to have some response, some little return ; and I am content to live a dream-

less, purposeless life, if that pleases you—to live for you only, to be moved only by your whims and fancies; but my pride will not let me put up with insult as well as neglect. I am content to be your slave, but you must not taunt me with my dependence, my origin, my poverty. Let me be a slave and a creature of your will, but don't tell me of it, and let your lip curl into a sneer. If you stood there with a whip and lashed me you could not hurt me so much as you do when you look at me as you did just now."

"All right," said Mr. Gardner, taking out a match, lighting a cigar, and turning on his heel.

She watched him with a dull expression of surprise. When he had disappeared, she returned to her seat, her eyes fixed upon the gate which he had closed behind him, as he coolly strolled away into the meadows that led down to the river. As he disappeared, she saw a figure outside the

hedge pause and look wistfully at her. It was a pale, thoughtful, sad face, and it looked at her with unutterable tenderness. "Tristram!" she exclaimed, and as she spoke the vision faded into the sunny air.

CHAPTER II.

VISIONS OF FORBIDDEN LOVE.

“HE is gone now, my darling; your father has gone to London, and I must talk to you or I shall go crazy. Kiss mamma, love.”

The little one pursed up its chubby lips and kissed its mother. It was sitting on a crimson shawl in the midst of a hillock of hay. Mamma was kneeling beside it. They made a beautiful picture in the shade of the oak-trees at a bend of the hayfield outside The Cottage garden, bordering the Essam wood that stretched away in leafy splendour for nearly a mile

behind them. The wood was shut out by a long, luxuriant hedge-row.

It was a hot July afternoon. The mowers had left the grass to dry. The birds were still. Only a purple butterfly alighted here and there upon the hay-cocks. The wild hop and the white convolvulus climbed in and out of the hedge. The distant call and clapper of the bird-boy came up from the cornfields like an echo.

"Sometimes I think I am a little mad, baby, don't you, dear? Never so mad as not to love you. I wonder if you will grow up to become tired of mamma; to look at her aside, and say unkind things to her?"

"Coo-coo," said the baby, stretching out its little arms.

"Bless you, my sweetie!"

She kissed it, and filled its lap with hay.

"I am going to tell you something,

Willie; I shouldn't tell you, only I know you can't understand it. I wouldn't tell you for the world if I thought you could."

"Coo-coo," said Willie.

"Yes, I know it loves mamma, and it likes mamma to say silly things to it, doesn't it?"

"Coo-coo," replied the baby.

"Well, then, there was a poor young man in New York—I don't mean poor as to money, but I say poor, because I pity him—and his name was Tristram Decker."

She looked round as if to make sure there were no listeners. A solitary peewit in the wood seemed to make answer in its melancholy way, and assure her of a faithful sentinel on duty. "Peewit!" it cried, and still further away came up the hollo of the bird-boy.

"I think the birds and things begin to know us, Willie; they think they know how lonely mamma is, and they want to comfort her."

A squirrel looked down from the oak trees and whisked away, as if to tell his companions not to come and disturb the pretty people down by the hedgerow.

"What was I saying? Oh, I know; now listen."

The baby tossed the hay from its lap and laughed.

"Yes, that's fine! Oh, what a strong boy!"

She kissed the chubby face, and then, re-seating the little one upon its crimson carpet, said,—

"Hush! Now I'm going to talk. I know where I was; that poor young man in New York. He loved mamma, he would have died for her; sometimes I think he is dying for her now. I saw him this very day last week looking over the hedge in the garden. Hush! Don't be frightened, and I'll tell you all about it."

"Coo-coo," said the baby.

“ Papa had been unkind again to mamma, very unkind ; oh, so cruel, so cruel ! and I wished I was dead but for you, dear, but for you ; and when Philip turned away as if I had been a black slave—yes, worse than mamma ever treated the worst coloured woman on her father’s plantation,—just then, when I thought my heart would break, Tristram Decker looked at me over the hedge. Hush, dear, it wasn’t him, it was his spirit ; and I think he must have died for me, unless somehow his heart felt the ache of mine, and he was so sorry that the good angels let his soul free for a moment to say it was sorry. Do you think he’s dead, baby ? ”

The baby held up its face to be kissed.

“ You do,” said the mother, putting her arms round the child and kissing it. “ You do ; then I have no friend in the world, Willie. Even if he were alive, he could be no friend of mine, dear, because he loves me ; it wouldn’t be right, dear.

Strange, is it not? It wouldn't be right, because he loves me so much that he would die for me. But you mustn't be sorry for him; he fought in the war against us, and your grandfather cursed him as he cursed all the North, and so I came to be here. Do you think mamma really did see that poor young man, or is solitude and neglect afflicting her mind?"

"Coo-coo," responded little Willie.

"Are you real? Or are you a fairy-child sent to play with me? I believe you are as wise as I, Willie—you may easily be wiser. I'm only a child, a wayward child, and I am naughty too. They have given me a new and beautiful world to live in, and I was wicked enough to call it a cage. But I am a foreigner here—a creature who doesn't belong to these beautiful woods and fields, though they do try to make me welcome; and if it weren't for poor Willie, I should wander away over yonder hills, or perhaps go

and lay me down in the river, by the side of the lilies. I daren't take you along, because you are not all mine, darling, and so I stay here to play with you, that the good people may not say I am ungrateful."

The baby had looked into its mother's eyes, and as if under their loving influence had gradually moved into an attitude of repose, and slept.

She lay down beside it, and her voice fell into a gentle whisper.

"I wonder who you are like,—not like Philip, not like me. May you be unlike in your heart, unlike in your fortunes! When you grow to be a man, be kind to the memory of your mother; and for her sake be gentle and loving to all women, they are so weak and obedient; and, oh, may you never know the heart-ache which your mother has suffered these last few weeks,—if you do, you will hate your father, as I am beginning to hate him!"

Her voice grew louder. She rose to her feet.

“For these last seven days I have suffered a lifetime of misery; insulted, treated with scorn, sneered at: it is four days since he has spoken to me. I have asked his forgiveness, I have kneeled to him, he doesn’t speak. I, Caroline Denton! Why, I don’t think my heart stood still as it did in presence of Philip, when I fled with my father at night, and we stopped to look back and saw the house in flames, and heard the cries of the men, who neither gave nor received quarter.”

A woman entered the field at the furthest corner. Caroline saw her, and straightway took up the sleeping child.

“Dorothy is coming, darling, we must go; I don’t know whether she is a good woman or a bad one, but we must go now.”

Nurse and mistress met in the middle of the field. Mrs. Gardner laid the child

in the arms that were put out to receive it.

“Why lor, bless me, missus, you ’ll have a sunstroke if you don’t mind!” said Dorothy, a bony, weather-beaten woman, in a lilac print dress and a white sun-bonnet.

“We were in the shade all the time, Dorothy,” Mrs. Gardner replied, submissively.

“Master’s been looking everywhere for you.”

“The master?”

“Yes, he’s bin and come back—lost the train or something; and he seems to be in a fine way.”

“What about, Dorothy?” asked Mrs. Gardner, increasing her pace towards the house.

“Lor bless me, I don’t know, but he looked as frightened as if he’d seen a ghost.”

“A what!” exclaimed Mrs. Gardner.

"A ghost. There, don't stare at me like that, missis; I declare you gave me a regular start."

All at once Mrs. Gardner felt as guilty as if Tristram Decker had really come to visit her, and had been met by her husband on the threshold of The Cottage. A thousand fears crowded into her heart, as if the very ghost of the North American could dishonour her fair fame in the eyes of her husband.

"A ghost!" she said again. "Lor, no, there are no ghosts in the middle of the day, though one 'ud think you'd seen one, to look at you."

"Yes, I feel frightened, Dorothy."

"What at? your own shadow, mum?"

"I don't know."

"There, don't fluster yourself; don't go into the house like that, specially with a visitor in the drawing-room."

"A visitor?"

"Yes, we don't have no visitors as a rule, but this is the exception."

"What's he like?"

"How did you know it were a he mum?"

"Is he pale, and has he blue eyes, and is he young?"

She had the vision-face before her.

"Pale! He's a red-faced, grey-bearded, pompous party, and the other's not young either, though he's dressed up to the nines, as they says at Essam."

"Two visitors?"

"Yes, I said there was two."

"Did you?"

"A course I did. And they come in with master, and they was a-having 'igh words when I thought as I'd come out and see where you was."

"What were they saying?"

"I dunno, except as one of 'em kept a-calling master Mr. Slyboots, as he said don't expec me to call you Gardner."

‘Nothing of the kind,’ he said; ‘though you does keep a gardener, I expect, and a good ‘un,’ says the other, which he talked like a Scotchman; the very image of Scotch Jimmy as keeps a grocery shop at Essam.”

“Friends of your master, I suppose, from London,” said Mrs. Gardner, not willing to learn anything to his disadvantage from a servant.

“Friends, well I should say as they was enemies; and if he owed ‘em a lot of money or something worse, they couldn’t have treated him more disrespectful.”

“You have made some mistake,” Mrs. Gardner said, with dignity.

“That’s what the Scotch gentleman said master had made, thinking as he could go on without bein’ found out.”

“Silence, woman!” said Mrs. Gardner; don’t you see that you annoy me. How dare you pry into your master’s affairs

and talk of them to me! I tell you you have made some mistake."

"Thank you, missus; somebody has made a mistake, but it ain't Dorothy Migswood. Woman, indeed! I'd like you to remember as you ain't talking to black nigger slaves when you're talking to me, mum."

"You need not remind me of the fact, nurse," said Mrs. Gardner; "they were human if they were black."

"Oh, they was; then carry your brat yourself, Miss Slave Driver!" exclaimed Migswood, thrusting little Willie into the mother's arms. "If I ain't as good as a black nigger slave, I ain't good enough to carry this thing."

Little Willie woke up and cried. His mother hastily folded him to her breast, and hurried through the garden-gate, where Tristram Decker had looked at her and disappeared.

"A parcel of stuck-up minxes; one

would think they was Queen Victoria herself and all the royal family instead of a lot of no-better-than-they-should-be's."

Dorothy Migswood said this for the benefit of the head fly-driver from the Lion, who was waiting in the road with a cab, and talking to a stranger.

"You haint in a good temper this mornin'," said the driver, "Mrs. Migswood."

"Don't call me Mrs., I'm Miss, and don't pretend to be no more, though I have brought up a family."

The driver leaned back and laughed a loud guffaw.

"Who's your friend?" she asked, looking at a little ugly man who was sucking a short pipe and leaning against the gate.

"Meaning me," said the stranger, winking at the driver. "I'm Bill Smith, and when I'm at 'ome, which ain't often, I lives in the Ole Kent Road."

He was a small man, with what might be called accentuated features. His boots

were down at the heel; his hat was shiny and stuck on one side; his clothes were a dingy black; the sleeves of his coat nearly covered his hands. Two glossy tufts of hair were curled and flattened against his cheeks. His mouth was an aperture that closed tightly, so that sometimes it only looked like an indication of a mouth. His nose had been broken; and he had a wretched squint.

"Oh, you are a Londoner, are you," said Miss Migswood, "like master? You're a gay old lot, you folks in London."

"We air, we air," said Bill Smith, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and putting the black cutty in his pocket.

"And what do you want down here?"

"Come to see you, my dear; that's what we're arter; that's our little game."

Bill Smith grinned a ghastly smile.

"Well, you arn't much in the way of beauty in London if you're a specimen," said Dorothy, sticking her arms akimbo

her flapping sun-bonnet falling back upon her broad bony shoulders.

The fly-driver roared with laughter.

"Beauty's only skin-deep—we goes in for brains in town," said Smith.

"And where do you carry yours—in your boots? They looks as if they was weighted."

The fly-driver nearly had a fit. The horse thought this was a signal to move; Bill Smith had to take it by the head.

"I never see such a pair in my life," gasped the driver.

"As his ears?" asked Dorothy, looking at Bill Smith's head.

"Well, you air a caution," was the Londoner's answer. "You knows your way about. I used to think I was good at chaff, but you licks me; that's truth."

"I can't stop a-talking here all day. What's up?" said Miss Migswood, pulling her bonnet over her head; "and my complexion will go if I stands in the sun."

"My sides is regular aching," remarked the fly-driver.

"Oh, you 're easily pleased," responded Migswood; "every fool in Essam knows that."

The Lion's head driver laughed again, and mopped his face with his handkerchief; for the sun was coming down "a 'ot un," as Bill Smith had more than once observed.

"Well, now, look 'ere, Miss Migswood; as you seems the right sort, and as business may bring us together, I don't mind telling you a secret."

"Don't bust yourself about it," said Dorothy. "I don't think business nor nothing else will bring you and me together; so if the thought as it will makes you free with your secrets, keep 'em, and then you won't be disappointed."

"Ha! ha!" roared the Lion driver, "trust Dorothy Migswood; she's got the tongue of old 'Arry hisself."

“Oh, come, you’re a presuming on your petticoats,” said Mr. Smith. “If you don’t want to be friendly, why there ain’t no love lost, and the least said soonest mended, and so mum’s the word.”

Bill Smith hit his open mouth with his open hand. The result was a hollow sound, like drawing a bung from a barrel.

“All right, I’m in no hurry; you arn’t the first bum-bailiff I’ve seen, and there’s a chap in Essam as can play the drum on his cheeks, and draw corks forty to the dozen; he’d give you ninety in a hundred and jump on you,” said Dorothy.

Turning her back on Mr. Smith, of the Old Kent Road, she made a face at the driver from the Lion, and marched into the pretty garden of The Cottage, leaving the Londoner staring in amazement, and the countryman shaking the cab with his laughter.

“Baint she a clever un?” he said at last.

“A clever un,” exclaimed Bill Smith, contemptuously, “she’s a ——”

It was a word we cannot print.

“I’ll let ’er see! A what did she call me?”

“A bum-bailiff,” said the driver, coming promptly to his rescue.

“She’s a liar! That ain’t my profession; and if I thought I looked like it, blame me if I wouldn’t chop my ’ed off, there now!”

He took out his pipe and relighted it.

“A bum!” he exclaimed. “Why, what sort of a bringin’ up ’as that woman ’ad?”

“Bringin’ hup; why she’s the most audacious lot in all the county; she’s bin in prison, she’s bin in London, she’s bin in the workus, she’s bin had up for ’saulting a magistrate; and for all that there’s lots a folk as ’ud give anything to hear ’er talk, she’s such a witty un.”

“She’s a fool!”

"Not she! Whatever she may be, she baint a fool."

"A woman as can't tell a respectable sheriff's hoffer, who's never touched a common distress in 'is life, from a two bob a day man and his grub, I tell you is a fool. Me! Bill Smith, of the Ole Kent Road—me! as as took possession of palaces and bin in *fi. fas.* and *ca. sas.* for thousands, to be mistook for a man shoved in for rent, why, blame 'er, I've 'ad the maid of a marchingness to wait on me."

"Come, guvnor, you'r taking of it too much to 'art; she be only a joking of you."

"There's one thing, Mister Coachman, as no professional man likes, and that is, aspersions on his professional position. But there, as you says, it don't matter, you can't expec more nor a grunt from a hani-mal of that sort."

"Shshsh!" said Mister Coachman, "don't you let her 'ear you. She 'd think no more

about a knocking you down than I do a whisking them flies off that horse's back."

"Wouldn't she?" said Mr. Smith, quickly. "Do you know what I could give her for that?"

"I don't know, and I'm sure she don't care," said the driver.

"Three months; and s'help me if I wouldn't do it, there!"

"Are you from the Lion?" said a quick, anxious voice, breaking in upon the dialogue of town and country.

"Yes, sir," replied the driver, quickly.

The new-comer was Mr. Tom Sleaford, pale and careworn. He flung a hand-bag into the open fly, and got in after it.

"Drive me to the Penfield Station, and come back for the two gentlemen afterwards," he said, quickly. "The mid-day express stops at Penfield?"

"Yes, sir."

“ And not at Essam ? ”

“ No, sir.”

“ Catch the express and I ’ll give you a crown for yourself.”

“ Yes, sir.”

Bill Smith watched the carriage roll along the road until it was lost in a cloud of summer dust.

“ Good-bye, Mister Sleaford, *alias* Mr. Philip Gardner; this ’ere ansum cottage estate, in a ring fence, to be sold by auction, with all the wery choice and helegant furniture and heffects, without reserve. Harticles of virtue, hold china, billiard-tables, wines of the finest vintages, by order of the Sheriff of Middlesex; and I honly ’ope, Mister Sleaford, financier, director, manager, and general swell, that’s the werry worst thing as ’ll ’appen to you; that’s all the ’arm I wishes you, sir, and a pleasant journey to you. I ’ope the sherry wine’s good, Mister Sleaford, junior. If there’s anything I ’ates more

nor another, it is bad sherry wine; but give me a good dinner and a bottle of old brown, with a Madeiry flavour, and I wouldn't call the Queen my aunt—s' help me!"

CHAPTER III.

THE AWAKENING.

“ARE you the person they call Mrs. Philip Gardner?” said Mr. Maclosky Jones to the southern woman, as she entered the dining-room, where that gentleman and Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson was sitting examining a pile of papers.

She had laid the baby in its cot.

“I am Mrs. Gardner,” she replied.

“Puir body!” said Maclosky, looking up at the trembling woman; “that man has deceived you.”

She stood by the table, her left hand leaning upon it for support.

"I don't understand you," she said, with an anxious look at Mr. Robinson, who laid down a cigar which he had been smoking.


"Don't tell her so bluntly," said Robinson, stopping Maclosky, who was about to reply.

"I don't see the gude o' beating about the bush," said the Scotchman, tying up a parcel of papers with red tape; "the truth is jest the truth, however you may hedge it about with fine phrases."

Mrs. Gardner stood motionless, as if she were in a dream.

"Before you ask us any questions," said Robinson, in something like a tone of compassion, "you had perhaps better retire to some other room and read this letter which Mr. Gardner left for you."

He held out a sealed envelope. She took it mechanically, and went to the bedroom where her child was sleeping in a



pretty swan cot. The infant lay there like a fairy child in a fairy nest, the great wings of the bird seeming to shield it from contact with the vulgar world.

The window was wide open. The leaves of a luxuriant creeper nodded at the casement, and made shadows on the linen-covered carpet.

Mrs. Gardner opened the letter. There fell out upon the floor a parcel of bank-notes. She looked at them carelessly, and then read as follows:—

“DEAR CAROLINE,—Our short time of pleasure is over. The separation will possibly please you, as you have evidently ceased to care for me or The Cottage. I am ruined in purse and possibly in character. I enclose you five hundred pounds, enough to take you back to America, and set you up in some little business. You are free. All is fair in love and war. I deceived you. My name is not Gardner, and I

am not your husband. Good-bye for ever.

“PHIL.”

She read the letter word by word, mastering its contents wholly, though every sentence stabbed her to the heart. She put her hand to her head, closed her eyes, and opened them again, as if to assure herself that she was not dreaming. She looked at the letter in her hand, at the notes on the floor. She saw the shadows of the leaves trembling on the carpet. The sweet breath of the fields came in at the open window, and she recognized its perfume. She looked at the cot, and thought for the first time how beautiful it was. She walked to the dressing-table, and looked at herself in the glass. A deep sigh seemed to acknowledge the fact that her face was very sad. Then she looked at the letter again, and finally, breaking out into a low moan, she said, “Father!

Tristram!" It was a wailing, subdued cry—the utterance of a well-nigh broken heart. "Father, father!" and "Tristram, Tristram!" she cried in her agony.

The child started and opened its wondering eyes.

"Willie!" she said, "little Willie!"

It whimpered. She took it into her arms, and pressed it closely to her bosom.

"Perhaps it is not true. I am his wife. That part of his cruel letter must be false. God knows I wouldn't have fallen so low, and known it."

She moaned again, and looked vaguely about the room. Then she sat down upon a chair, and rocked the child, which put its arms round her neck.

"My darling Willie!" she said, "I think I am having a bad dream; let your baby heart pray that mamma may wake."

There was a knock at the door. She paid no attention to it. The woman Migswood entered.

“ This is a nice go ! ” she said. “ What are you going to do ? ”

Mrs. Gardner made no reply. She went on rocking the child and herself to and fro.

“ You ’ll have to find another man now, and you ’ll easy do that ; many on ’em likes a bit of a pretty thing like you, and you needn’t go far to find a better than him as has gone and left yer. They ’re a mean set, men, best on ’em ; only way ’s to pay ’em out in their own coin.”

The words fell unheeded upon Mrs. Gardner.

“ Oh, you ’re going to sulk. Well, do as you likes ; I ’ve stood your airs long enough not to mind ’em much, and I never treads on them as is down ; I ’ve been down myself too often.”

“ Do you remember the day that I was married, Migswood ; when I was ill, you know ; soon after they buried father ? ” said Mrs. Gardner, looking up inquiringly.

"I suppose you didn't hear what I was saying on just now?"

"I never remembered it myself quite clearly."

"She's gone daft," said Migswood to herself; but in response to the question she said aloud, "Married! Why, lor, you never really means to say as you thinks you was married?"

"Not married!" exclaimed the American beauty, as if realizing the situation now for the first time.

She rose to her feet, laid the child once more in its cot, and taking Migswood by the arm she drew her aside.

"You are a woman, whatever else you may be," she said, earnestly looking into the hard, vulgar face of the servant. "He says he is not my husband; you echo him, and say I am not married. What does it mean? What is the matter? Am I dreaming, or am I awakening?"

"It depends what you calls dreaming.

I never thought for a moment as you was married, nor nobody else. Why there was two or three Mrs. Gardners afore you come to The Cottage."

"Two or three!" gasped the dupe.

"How do you think you could be married without knowing it?"

"Don't you remember when I got up after I had lain ill, and Philip took me to the city, and we came home, and you had a new gown, and the servants had a feast?"

"I remember that," said Migswood, smiling a contemptuous but half-piteous smile.

Mrs. Gardner rushed to a cabinet. The key was in the lock. She opened the drawer.

"Ah, it is gone!" she cried; "it is gone!"

She opened every other drawer in the cabinet.

"What was you looking for?"

"The certificate of our marriage."

"Ah, you may look."

"It was in that drawer."

"Was it?"

"Don't you believe me?"

"Oh, yes, if you say so."

"I have read it, had it in my hand; Philip told me to keep it in that drawer."

"I wouldn't bother about it if I was you," said Migswood, watching her in an amused and not altogether dissatisfied manner. "What name was he married in?"

"Gardner, of course. Oh, what is all this mystery?"

"No mystery as I see on. What do he say hisself? The gents downstairs tells me as he's writ you a letter."

"Read it," she said, giving her the paper.

"I can't read," said Migswood; "what do he say?"

The servant stooped down and picked up the notes.

“ Be this the money as he ’s left for yer ?
They said he ’d put some in the letter.”

“ That is your master’s money,” said
Mrs. Gardner.

Migswood laid it upon the table.


“ Master’s money !” said the woman,
mockingly. “ Why don’t you ha’ done
with your fine airs. A pretty master ! I
ain’t got no master and no husband no
more than you have, and the sooner you
gets that into your wool-gathering little
noddle the better.”

Caroline Denton stood still and looked
at the woman without seeing her, for her
eyes were straining to follow her thoughts,
which went over all the course of her life
in England ; her father’s death ; Philip
Gardner’s kindness ; her removal from the
hotel near the scene of the fatal accident by
which she lost her father to The Cottage ;
her surprise and fear when she found her-
self the inmate of her benefactor’s house ;
his respectful kindness, followed by the

offer of his hand ; her gratitude ; her struggle to forget Tristram Decker, whom she found she had begun to love ; her resolve to obey the commands of her father even though he were dead ; her marriage to Philip at the Proctor or Registrar's office as he called it ; his strange habits since then ; his mysterious comings and goings ; and latterly his unkindness to her. She sought for a clue to her position. She began to doubt and fear.

" I will go to the place where we were married," she said ; " that shall be cleared for Willie's sake. I must not give way ; I must be bold and courageous for Willie. This is not the first time I have seen trouble."

" Yes, you'll want all your wits about you, but I wouldn't bother if I were you ; none of the other women did. When the game was over they just hooked it, and made no fuss. But I expect he took some trouble with you."



"The other women," repeated Mrs. Gardner, "the other women—"

"I told you of 'em just now. None of them pretended as they was married."

In spite of her brave efforts to stand up against the calamity that had befallen her, Mrs. Gardner, or Caroline Denton, whichever was her rightful name, staggered against the wall, and stood there with her hand upon her heart, uttering that cry of pain and wailing which had shaped itself into two words, "Father! Tristram!" when first she began to realize her trouble.

"Don't give way," said Migswood.

"Tell me all," said Caroline, in a hoarse whisper; "all."

"That's wot the gents downstairs said I'd better do."

"Tell me all. I am a poor, weak, foolish woman—a stranger; I know nothing—nothing."

"The gents downstairs 'as took regular possession of The Cottage. Mr. Gardner,

as he calls hisself, ain't bin honest, they says, and they has warrants to sell up The Cottage, and they thinks you'd better go into lodgings."

"Yes?"


"And they says as they suppose you knows as his name weren't Gardner at all, and they has no objections to your taking away any little things as you may have set your mind on."

"What do they mean?"

"I wish you wouldn't put on so much side, as they says at Essam. You can't be so awful green as you makes out."

Caroline looked at her in blank amazement.

"Come now, do you mean to say as you thinks he ever took you to London at all? The other women used to call him Charlie; it's always Charlies with us sort, I think, but you preferred Phil. Well now, really, is American girls so jolly innocent as all that?"



"I don't quite know what you mean, but I can see by your face that you are insulting me, and that you are cruel. No American woman would stamp on another in trouble."

"Why, I've heard you tell that baby o' yourn of wars and murders as Americans done again you. But, there, it's no business o' mine, only you keeps on a axin' of me questions, and if you really are so blessed innocent as you makes out, why it won't do no harm to open your eyes a bit. Now, for hinstance, you says Mr. Charlie—beg parding, Mr. Gardner—took you to London and married you, and you had the writings?"

"Yes."

"Sure it were London?"

"Yes."

"You'd never seen it before?"

"No, nor since."

"My belief is as you never see it at all."

"Why do you say that? I could take you to the very hotel where we dined."

"Well, I dunno; you started in the morning and were back at night. It could be done, oh, yes. But there, it's no business of mine."

"Yes it is; don't be unkind. I am sure we went to London; I can never forget the busy streets, the carriages, the crowded stages, the noise and din."

"Then I'm wrong. It was London, of course; and why shouldn't it be? Oh, yes, it were London, of course."

"Why, then, do you try to make me believe I have been mad or dreaming? Why do you like to torture me?"

"I baint a torturing of you. I be only answering what you axes me. But you do act so it sets my teeth on edge. Good gracious, you ain't the first gal that's gone wrong."

Caroline looked at the savage woman out of her sad, sorrowful eyes, which

would have rebuked any other she-dragon but Migswood, who bore the appeal with perfect equanimity. She insisted upon regarding Mrs. Gardner as a woman who, in spite of a show of virtue, had fallen to her level; and it rather rejoiced her than otherwise to have so good-looking a companion in sin and misfortune.

“You are a hard, cruel woman.”

“Thank yer.”

“What have I done that you should be so pitiless to me?”

“Oh, well, there, if you’re going to call names I’ll go; mayhap I may lose my temper, and then I might shake you.”

Migswood surveyed her victim with a calm, cold expression.

“I can’t abear to have you a domineering over me in your ’igh virtuous way, as if I wos dirt. It ain’t what you says, it’s what you looks. I know what I am, and don’t set up for nør better. But—”

“Don’t shout at me; I’m very sorry; I

didn't mean to be unkind. I ask your pardon. I shall not trouble you much longer. Are those persons you spoke of still in the house?"

"Yes, and they be going to stay all night; and the bum-bailiff he's in the kitchen."

Caroline took her sleeping child out of the cot, and went down to the dining-room.

"Is this true that my servant tells me?" she asked.

"What does she tell you, mam?" was Maclosky's cautious reply.

"That my husband is a fugitive; that his name is not Gardner; that I have been duped; that you are the rightful owners of this cottage."

"I dinna ken about your being duped, but the man who wrote the letter you hold in your hand, who called himself Gardner, is a bankrupt; he has been living a life of debauchery for years, and you are not the

first, nor second, nor third mistress who have lived with him here."

"Sir, I am no mistress, I am his lawful wife, married according to your English law, and till to-day I had the record of it."

"What, the certificate?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where were you married, mam?"

• "In London."

"In church?"

"No."

"Before a Registrar?"

"We went to an office, where they asked questions, and put our names in a book, and gave my husband a document."

"Did he say his name was Philip Gardner?"

"Yes."

"He lied there then, and can be prosecuted for it; but I dinna think it vitiates the marriage."

“Will you show me the authority under which you act?”

“The officer has it; he’s down in the kitchen.”

“I will go and fetch it,” said Robinson, leaving the room, and returning with the sheriff’s warrant of distress, which Mrs. Gardner looked at.

“If it were not for this letter I should think my husband were the victim of a conspiracy.”

“Indeed!” said Maclosky. “Would ye like to see what the newspapers say on the subject?”

He took a paper from his pocket.

“I don’t think I would harass the lady any further,” said Robinson.

“She’d better know the truth,” said Maclosky, handing a newspaper to Caroline, with a marked paragraph to the following effect:—

“THE ROMANCE OF FRAUD.—A gentle-

man, who for several years has been residing on a pretty estate in the Vale of Essam, where his doings have surprised and scandalized the respectable families of that district, turns out to be the director and manager of certain companies now in course of liquidation, in which frauds to a considerable amount have been detected. Mr. Philip Gardner is the assumed name of this director, who will, we understand, be declared bankrupt to-morrow. His delightful retreat on the Avon will speedily come under the hammer, and in these evil days there will not possibly be wanting sympathizers who will regard the downfall of the Essam landowner with some amount of sorrow, because he furnished his residence with choice pictures and rare china, thus redeeming his vulgar crime by proving himself to be a man of taste. We refrain from mentioning the young man's real name out of respect for his father, who is known in the city as an upright

man, and who is, we believe, a serious sufferer by his son's defalcations."

"There, mem, that's a clear straightforward statement," said Maclosky, folding up the paper and laying it down carefully upon the table.

"His father," said Caroline; "he told me his father was dead."

"And you'd better jest consider that it's true, for you might as well try to get butter out of a dog's mouth, or justice out of a liquidator, as anything out of him; for he jest hates ye, woman,—he jest regards you and such like as the ruin of his son."

The woman looked at him. She only half understood what he said.

"Is there anything else I can do for ye?" asked the Scotchman.

She made no reply.

"Look here, my dear," said Robinson, rising and putting his arm familiarly on her shoulder.

She recoiled from his touch.

“Oh, well, if we stand on our dignity so much, I have done,” said Robinson, who had cast bold and admiring glances at her during the painful scene. “I was going to give you some good advice.”

She turned away from him without a word, and, addressing herself to Mr. Maclosky Jones, said,—

“I’m a foreigner here, and don’t understand your customs. I am an entire stranger; which is the way to London?”

“The most sensible question ye could ask, though I’d take a steamer from Liverpool if I were going to America.”

She made no reply.

“The Essam station is jest close by, and I’ll order the carriage to take ye whenever ye conclude to go. You’ve got money, I understand, and we’re not disposed to tak it away from ye. I dinnat hold wi’ turning a young person adrift without funds.”

“ Good day, sir ; I don’t think I’ll trouble you any further.”

Before Mr. Maclosky Jones had time to reply she left the room.

“ A pretty impudent baggage ! ” said Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson.

“ Jest the sairt o’ woman to tempt a saint. Did ye regard her black ’een ? Aye, mon, I’ve seen the day I could jest o’ fallen deep in love with a wee bit foreigner lassie like that. She didna seem to regard your insinuatins’ ways, I’m thinkin’.”

“ She’s a fool ! ” said Robinson.

CHAPTER IV.

FALLEN AMONG THIEVES.

“ You want a lodging ? Ah, bless yer swate face,” said an old woman, pushing her way to Caroline’s side, as she stood bewildered among the crowd of passengers just emptied into the gaslight upon the arrival platform of the Great Western Railway at Paddington. “ A nice clean place as ever ye see ; ah, let me carry the baby for ye.”

The passenger—yesterday mistress of that lovely retreat on the Avon, to-day a fugitive and a wanderer—hugged the infant close to her breast, as the woman known as Irish Moll put out her arms.

"Ah, well, then, I'll not touch the darlint. The saints bless and kape it; but you've travelled a long way, and you're a stranger intirely, and what'll I do for ye at all?"

"Is this your luggage?" asked a porter, coming up to Mrs. Gardner, with a small bag in his hand.

"Yes," said the woman.

"Are you expecting somebody to meet you, or can I get you a cab?" asked the porter, bent rather upon his fee than upon rendering assistance.

"No," said Irish Moll, promptly, "she just wants a lodging for the night, and I'm the woman she's expecting to get it for her."

Though accustomed to see many strange people, it occurred to the porter that there was something peculiar in the association of these two women—one of them delicate, beautiful, ladylike, for he could see that the passenger was all this even in the

gaslight; the other a common, shuffling Irishwoman, who might have been a huckster, an orange-seller, or the director of a low lodging-house. Before he had time to do more than let the curious contrast of the figures flash through his muddled brain, his services were required in another direction, and he laid the hand-bag from Essam down by its owner and disappeared.

“ Ah, give the bag to me; sure an’ I’ll carry it for ye. Come away with Molly, and I’ll get you some tay and a bloater, and make ye as comfortable as the fine house you’ve left.”

Caroline allowed herself to be led away. A stranger, bewildered and alone—the unaccustomed noise, the lights, the cries of porters, cabs dashing to and fro, people pushing hither and thither—it seemed as if this kindly-speaking old woman was providentially sent to her help. She was ready to lean upon any one, lest the cruel

crowd should sweep over her like a torrent and leave her stranded.

“ Let me take hould ov yer arm, darlint,” said Irish Moll; “ ye are not used to this big town. Come aways wid ye, and we can find yer frinds in the mornin’.”

In and out between cabs and horses, over the road, and into a street of shops, with here and there a blaze of light illuminating the two figures, the one grim, fawning, shuffling, and leading the other, a slight, well-dressed girl, with a child in her arms. It was eleven o'clock. The heat of the sun had left behind it a clammy haze. From streets of shops and blazing gin palaces they came to a region of houses packed together in rows, with here and there groups of men and women standing in the doorways, or lolling out of the windows to try and catch a breath of fresh air, but only succeeding in picking up the odours of stale vegetables or whiffs of strong tobacco.

“Ah, ye mustn’t mind the looks of Porter’s Buildings; we aren’t rich any of us, but we ’re honest and we ’re clane; and Molly Maloney isn’t the woman to bring ye anywhere wheres ye ’ll not be comfortable.”

More than once Mrs. Gardner was on the point of resisting her guide’s well-assumed authority; but it seemed as if the woman read her thoughts and combated them with reassuring words, and appeals to the saints and testimonials to her own honesty.

They reached a narrow passage.

“There, now, we ’ll soon be at home,” said Irish Moll, “and a cup ov tay will cheer ye.”

Irish Moll opened the door of a small house and brought the traveller into a room furnished as a bed and sitting-room combined. The darkness was made dimly visible by a lamp which gave forth more odour than light. But Molly Maloney, as

the old hag delighted to call herself, turned the light up, and it fell, as if with a flash of surprise, upon the pale face of Caroline Denton, seated in a chair, and looking in a blank kind of way at nothing.

It might have occurred to her that the change from The Cottage to Porter's Buildings was something too dreadful to think of; but no such thought troubled her. She had a vague desire in her mind to find out whether she was legally married or not. And since she had left The Cottage this desire had almost given way to fear that inquiries would only lead to a miserable and unhappy discovery. Her leading idea at the outset had been to fly from Essam; to put The Cottage and its new possessors behind her; to get away from the brutal taunts of Migswood; to shut out the scene of her shame. Once she had thought of seeking consolation and inspiration at her father's grave, and then it dawned upon her that she did not know

where he was buried. In that awful hour, when he was carried to a wayside hotel dead before her face, she had lost all consciousness of things, and had more or less remained in a state of insensibility for many days. She remembered, during her waking moments, a kind voice, a constant attendant upon her, a young man who said he was her father's friend, and who ministered to her every want, only at last to cast her adrift, a waif and stray upon the world. She had no papers in her possession as to her identity, no record of her father's death, no certificate of her marriage, nothing. Mr. Gardner had made a clean sweep of all these documents, newspapers, and writings before leaving The Cottage and the beautiful woman who, for a time, had, even in his eyes, converted it into a paradise.

While travelling to London, these facts, in a dreamy, uncertain way, had got into her mind, and she realized more or less

her position. She was a unit in the world—a thing without a name, a homeless wanderer, belonging to nobody; and whether Heaven had given her a child in mockery, or out of love and mercy she knew not; she only knew that she loved it with all her heart and soul, and that she would never part with it and live. As she sat staring at nothing in the parlour of No. 5, Porter's Buildings, she saw none of the indications of poverty about her. The tawdry fire-paper in the grate, covered with soot; the torn blind, yellow with dirt and age; the cracked cups and saucers that Molly Maloney placed upon the rickety table; the kettle she tried to boil over a lamp on the mantel-shelf; the wanderer saw none of these things—her thoughts were far away, and in spite of her they were following in imagination the fortunes of Tristram Decker. She fancied she saw him in some far distant corner of America, and it almost comforted

her to feel that he was thinking of her. He was the only friend she had in the world ; and she had seen him looking over the gate in the Vale of Essam.

At first that vision only impressed her with the belief that he was dead ; for they were superstitious people in her southern home, and the old negress who nursed her as a child constantly saw ghosts and spirits. Since yesterday, however, her troubled mind had put out hands, as it were, to feel for something or somebody to cling to, and they had brought back the thought that perhaps Decker was coming to her ; that the vision she had seen was the shadow of his coming, the warning sent on before. While she was regarding this possibility with child-like satisfaction, however, the woman's view of the situation intervened and made her shudder. What could she say to Tristram Decker ? If he sought her, it would be with his heart full of love for her, full of

tender memories. And even the declaration, "I am married," as if it were not bitter enough, might be contradicted in his hearing, and he would look upon her as an outcast, a thing for scorn and contumely.

Irish Moll went on talking to her lodger, who made her no answer, but presently rose and staggered to the bed.

"Ah, that's right; it's rest ye want. Lie ye down and I'll make the tay for ye; and ye'll find that bed as soft as a lady's couch, that ye will."

The baby cried. Mrs. Gardner laid it upon the pillow, and, lying beside it, soothed it and stroked its head.

"I'll just go out now and buy ye the bit of supper this night, and something for the darlint's breakfast. Will ye be giving me a few shillings to make the purchases?"

"Give me a little water."

"Sure and the tay'll be ready in less than a minute."

“A little water.”

Mrs. Maloney found some water after much searching. It was warm, but the fugitive drank it.

“Ah, thank the saints you’re getting better. Did ye hear what I said about the supper and the few shillings?”

“Yes,” she answered, taking the purse out of her pocket.

It was in Molly’s hand the moment it appeared.

“I’ll just take five shillin, darlint, that’s all,” she said, examining the purse at the lamp; “that’s enough; sure five shillings will get you a mighty fine supper and breakfast.”

She handed the purse back, and as she left the house impressed upon “the darlint” that she would return in a few minutes. But she came back no more. There were notes and gold in the wanderer’s purse. Wicked eyes leered at the money: cruel fingers clutched it. Irish

Moll was a professional thief, and something even worse. One of her favourite "lays," as they called the cruel business in Porter's Buildings, was to pick up men or women at the great railway stations, unfortunate girls flying from disgrace in rural districts, countrymen seeking lodgings—strangers, in fact, to London, for whom armies of plunderers, men and women, are continually on the watch. The favourite stations are Victoria, Charing Cross, and Waterloo; but Irish Moll varied her operations just as she varied her place of residence. She had only looked in upon Paddington as a speculation; it was not one of her haunts, and it offered less facilities than the other big stations for her kind of work. The railway police are active men at Paddington, though Mrs. Maloney managed to elude them on this her first important stroke of business in that locality.

Left alone, the mother hummed a

lullaby to the child, and presently both slept where they lay. The shout of late revellers resounded in the court, and the shriek of women. But the Southern planter's daughter heard them not. Exhausted nature was recouping itself. The mother lay by her child, with her arms under its little head, as calm and still as if she were dead. Presently morning, dirty and grim, looked in upon them through the dusty window. The sun rarely deigned to cast even a solitary ray into the recesses of Porter's Buildings. The first light of morning was bathing Essam in a poetic mist, a grey halo, cool and fresh; the hedges were decked with liquid diamonds, birds were singing on every tree; but morning at Porter's Buildings was a different thing altogether. It seemed to hang about as if it were indifferent, if not ashamed of the work it had to do; for it had to reveal to men's eyes the black spots in the world, the filth

and degradation of life; to show the slimy depths to which human nature can fall. The first beams of morning never fell upon so sweet a picture of suffering innocence as that which they came upon at No. 5, Porter's Buildings. Sleep, like his brother Death, had smoothed all signs of care from the mother's face. There was even a smile upon the half-parted lips; the closed eyes spoke of peace and rest; and the little face beside them was rosy with health.

It was hard to wake them so rudely. But the woman who came in with the morning wanted to know, with many curses, what in the name of Satan and other demons she was doing in her bed, and in her room. The new lodger woke with a cry, and, clinging to her child, sat up and stared wildly about. The drunken owner of the bed said, "Oh, yes, that was all very fine, but what was she doing there?" Mrs. Gardner stammered some

4

thing about an Irishwoman having brought her; whereupon the woman, who had come in with ribbons in her bonnet and silk upon her back, anathematized Irish Moll, and supposed she'd been at her little games again, and said, though she was her own mother, she'd suffer considerable torments if ever she should step inside that door again. Then she informed the infernal interloper and her brat that they'd better get out quick. Whereupon the stranger, who had been brought to this land flowing with milk and honey by a misguided father, slipped out at the door into a grimy passage, then into a court reeking with foul odours, and finally out into a broad deserted street.

She attracted the attention of a policeman, for they were the only persons to be seen, though a crowd of sparrows were chattering and quarrelling over their breakfasts in the roadway.

The officer said it was a queer kind of

time for a person to want an hotel. Where had she come from? What was she doing? Where did she live? He asked her many questions, and told her he had no idea where she could find a respectable hotel that would take her in. A baby and no luggage. Oh, she had left her luggage, she said, at the house where somebody had taken her for the night. The policeman said she should keep out of bad company. They had turned her out of the house, she said. What did she mean? Who had she been with? She didn't know; an Irishwoman. An Irishwoman, the policeman said, reflectively. Well, the best thing she could do was to go over to that early coffee-shop and get some coffee, and he would see if they would take her in at the hotel next door. He did not quite make out to his own satisfaction whether he was justified in helping her to this extent, but she looked something better than the sort of woman he

BOOK V.



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CHAPTER I.

ON BOTH SIDES OF THE CHANNEL.

IF not the most luxuriant, it was the pleasantest little studio in St. John's Wood. A north light, and furnished with odd things of all kinds and colours, it was sufficiently in disorder to indicate a bachelor tenant, and not without equal evidence of a feminine hand here and there. The jars and vases, the picture-frames, the screens that seemed to lie carelessly about, were clean. The carpet had been brushed; there were pipes, spill-cases, cards, and cigar-holders upon the

mantel-shelf. These things were lying about in admired disorder, but there was no dust. An easy chair near the fireplace was adorned with a satin antimacassar. A Japanese rug covered the centre of the room. The usual lay figure of an artist's studio stood in a jaunty attitude, like an intoxicated barbarian, and wore a robe of Indian silk. A couch where a model had been reclining was placed in position, commanded by an easel, upon which was lying an open book. A vase of roses decorated a small cabinet close by, and there was something not only in this fact, but more still in the arrangement of the flowers, that betokened a woman's touch.

While we are contemplating this abode of art, there enters a tall, picturesque-looking young man, stalwart, broad of chest, his hair cut close to his head, his beard hanging in a silken mass upon his chest. He wears a suit of grey clothes, a white shirt, no waistcoat, his jacket flung

back, and upon his feet a pair of thick, untanned shoes.

“Nonsense, my dear,” he was saying as he entered the studio,—“nonsense; you must shut out all the world when you cross the portals of the temple, and only think of me.”

The interesting lady who followed the artist had a letter and a newspaper in her hand. Slight in figure, with bright hazel eyes, she had in her face an expression of care which was not unfamiliar to the reader in the early days of this history, when Emily Sleaford had charge of the domestic economy of the corner house in Fitzroy Square. It was the first time that Fred Tavener had seen his wife really troubled since their marriage, which had taken place some six months prior to this summer morning when we meet Mr. Tavener for the first time. They had been united in a quiet, unostentatious way, though Mr. Sleaford had offered

Emily an imposing ceremony and breakfast. Their honeymoon had been spent on a sketching tour in Derbyshire, and Frank had been enabled to rent the house where he had previously lodged, with its pretty little studio built off the dining-room into the garden at the back. They were very happy, having married for love, though not necessarily to live in a cottage, and think bread and cheese and kisses the best of fare. Indeed, Frank always said he would not ask Emily to marry him until he was making a clear five hundred pounds a year, and Emily had always as consistently replied that the day he said he was ready he might put up the banns. She was a determined little lady, as we have already seen, Miss Emily Sleaford, but she was as good as gold—a great deal better than some gold—and her idea of keeping up appearances was not to shape your life according to Mrs. Grundy, but according to the honourable laws of those

moral ethics which are the outcome of honest hearts and well-balanced minds.

“This is my own particular and private preserve; I am monarch here,” continued the artist, “and a happy face is essential to the completion of my picture, which is to increase our income this year up to a thousand pounds.”

He put a powerful arm round the little figure, and kissed his wife upon the lips. She affected to rub her face afterwards, with the remark that she certainly would have him shaved; she might as well be hugged by a bear. Frank went to the mantel-shelf, lighted a cigarette, opened a window that looked upon a lawn dotted with flowers, sat cross-legged upon a wooden chair, and contemplated his wife through a cloud of white smoke. She was a dainty picture in an old-fashioned baby-dress, with long mittens upon her arms, and bows upon her shoulders. A frill at the bottom of her skirt fell short of a pair

of pretty ankles, and feet in silk stockings, and buckled shoes.

"You volunteered to sit, my love, and you must go through with it; I know fellows who make their wives models whether they will or no. I don't hold with that; but when your wife insists upon sending your professional sitter about her business, and takes her place, why then there must be no shirking it."

"If anybody heard you, what a tyrant they would think you," said Emily, sitting down upon the sofa.

"I should think they would," he said, flinging the remainder of his cigarette into the garden, and closing the window. "I am going to finish this picture before the month is out, whatever happens, and then I'll show you the sort of tyrant I am. I'll drag you all over the Continent, through Switzerland, Italy, France—I don't know where."

He was preparing his palette while he

talked ; a blackbird was piping aloud on the top of a tree in the garden, and Mrs. Tavener was vainly trying to bring back to her face the expression which had begun to play about the eye, which Tavener had transferred to his canvas.

"When you are troubled, then is the time to lose yourself in occupation," said the artist.

"Yes ; if you were sitting here, and I were drawing your picture, that would be a very different thing."

"A very indifferent one, I should say, judging from the attempt you made the other day," he replied.

"Frank, you are unkind."

"All my models say so."

"But really, dear, I don't think I can sit still this morning."

The artist laid his palette down, went up to his wife, sat by her side, and, in a voice of assumed banter, said,—

"Did it get tired of its work, then ?

Would it be a model, and then want to give it up just when it was becoming useful? Did it pretend to be strong-minded, and break down over the first bit of trouble that overtakes its family? Well then, it shall come for a nice little walk round the garden, and have a talk and see what's to be done."

The newspaper she held in her hand contained the paragraph which Mr. Maclosky Jones had read to Mrs. Gardner. It was stale news now, but some friend of Emily had sent her another copy, fearing she might not have seen it. The letter was from mamma, who had gone to Boulogne with Jeremiah the Good to meet and commune with their son. It stated that to save Tom from a criminal prosecution his father would have to part with all their property, and that their only hope now was that he would be able to successfully renew his suit with Jane Crosby. Tom was very penitent, and for

all their sakes it was better that they should become poor again, rather than suffer the stain upon their house of having a son sentenced to transportation. Jeremiah, she said, had behaved in the most magnanimous and paternal manner, having agreed to give up all he possessed, which, with the sale of Tom's property, would cover a portion of the defalcations sufficient to have the whole matter settled. "But I fear, love," the letter continued, "your father can never again do business in the City, and that we must try and make up an income by letting Fitzroy Square furnished, and living in humble lodgings. Your father thinks if we could take a little farm somewhere near the Thames, and keep fowls and have a boathouse, we might get along, and that Mr. Tavener could come down and paint there, as he is so fond of Thames subjects."

Emily read this again to Fred as they walked round and round the garden, a

square bit of well-cultivated ground, with creepers all over the walls, and a grass-plot with clumps of verbenas, geraniums, and fuchsias dotting it in small beds, that looked like splashes of gorgeous colour upon a green ground.

"Yes, that's kind about the Thames," said Frank.

"And so practical, isn't it?" said Emily, with a regretful smile.

"Very! They'd get two or three hundred a year from Fitzroy Square, and spend six on the Thames."

"Just what I was thinking."

"But you ought to have married a rich man, Em, and then you could have stepped in and put it all right."

"Nothing would put them all right, Frank; poor father's fortunes, ever since I can remember, have always been going up and down like a bucket in a well, and with the lively uncertainty of never knowing when it would come up empty or full.

I don't know what is to be done. Patty, however, is the greatest puzzle. Mamma complains bitterly of her, though I really cannot see that the girl is to be blamed. 'If I marry Mr. Roper,' she says, 'he shall have the ten thousand pounds; if I don't, it lies in the bank until I marry somebody else, and in that case I give it to my husband; therefore it is impossible for me to help father with that money; and it is no good being unkind about it.'"

"Yes; I wouldn't have given Patty credit for so much firmness," said Tavener.

"She surprises me. I thought I knew her thoroughly; I don't. She offers no explanation; she will neither say Yes nor No to Roper, now that father has given his consent; she goes on painting her water-colour sunsets, and nursing her foot at you when you sit down and talk to her; and I am quite beaten."

"That ten thousand pounds will ac-

cumulate and grow," replied Frank; "some day, if she does not marry, it will be a wonderful sum; it might, if kept long enough at interest, become big enough to pay off the National Debt. There's a nest egg for you!"

"What troubles me most is this proposed attack on Jane Crosby; there is something so humiliating and degrading in it that I have been thinking whether it is not my duty to write to Miss Crosby, or to see her and tell her everything. I know she does not dislike Tom; I fancy it is even possible she might marry him; and if she did she would be a wretched and miserable woman. What ought I to do?"

Frank Tavener stroked his beard, and drew his wife's arm under his own.

"You know as well as I do that Tom is a wicked, bad fellow."

"He is your brother, dear."

"He is none the less a scoundrel,—a heartless, designing, cruel man."

Mrs. Tavener quickened her steps, and a hot glow came upon her face.

"It is a bitter thing to say, and the sin of the business is heaviest when one looks at it from a sister's point of view. It may be selfish to say so, but think, Frank, what Patty and I lose in having for a brother a man like Tom, instead of a man we could be proud of. How delightful, for instance, if he could come and see us and smoke a cigar with you; but, there, it does not bear thinking of: if he does not end his days in prison or upon the gallows, I suppose we ought to be content."

"I think I should do nothing until your father and mother come home," said Tavener; "perhaps things are not so bad as they seem."

"Your motto is always 'wait,' Frank," replied the wife.

"Yes, it's a good old motto. Didn't I wait for you, and are you not here with your arm in mine, and wouldn't I give

you a kiss and hug you where you stand if that wretched Mother Sniggers were not watching us from her back window? She has been peeping behind her blind ever since we came out."

"I suppose I shall have to settle it for myself," said Mrs. Tavener; "you won't help me."

"I'm such an ass at family affairs, you know; ask my advice, dear, when you've made up your mind, and then you'll see how I shall wake up."

"I shall caution Jane Crosby."

"Very well, show me the letter when you have written it; and, now that burden is off your mind, come to work."

He put his arm round her, in spite of Mother Sniggers. She leaned lovingly against his great manly figure, and they re-entered the studio, which led Mother Sniggers to remark to herself that she didn't believe any two people that were really married would conduct themselves

so disgracefully in the broad face of day.

While Fred Tavener was idealizing his wife on canvas, two of the persons of whom they had been talking were sitting by an hotel window, overlooking the sea at Boulogne, after an excellent French breakfast, one of them smoking a cigar, both of them drinking claret. Mrs. Sleaford had gone out to do a little shopping. They were occupying a handsome suite of rooms, and were to be seen in an evening among the happiest-looking people at the *Etablissement*, where Tom played billiards, and Mr. and Mrs. Sleaford wandered in and out of the dancing and reading saloons, and otherwise conducted themselves like wealthy English people taking their ease. To protect them from the sun, which was flashing over the sea and making the city dazzling in its white beauty, an outer blind was carefully drawn. Tom Sleaford was sitting upon one chair, with

his legs on another. His father was walking up and down the room. Although they had been together for some days in Boulogne, they had evidently not forgiven each other, nor had they altogether made up their differences. Jeremiah the Politic, with his hands beneath his coat tails, was walking solemnly to and fro, his bald head shining with the dew of summer heat, his cravat neatly tied, his bushy whiskers bushier than ever, and his eye-glass dangling by a broad band of black ribbon, that made a long line across his white shirt front.

“It’s no good crying over spilt milk,” said Tom, contemplating his slippered feet and smoking in a calm, deliberative way that irritated his father almost to madness, “have another glass of claret and sit down, governor.”

“Spilt milk! If it had been honestly spilt,” cried Jeremiah, “if the Cow of Fortune had lifted her leg and tilted it

over, as she has done many a full bucket before now, then I could have borne it; but to see my own son take the milk, not to say the cream, of a city career and literally throw it down the gutter, it is wicked, it is slapping Fortune in the face, and snapping your fingers at Fate."

Jeremiah liked metaphors. He caught up the idea of spilt milk with avidity. He carried it up and down the room. He flung it at Tom. He launched it at the ceiling. He shook it like a flag. He dashed it upon the table. He stabbed the air with it. Finally he sighed, and drank a glass of claret.

"Spilt milk! Only to think what the phrase means. Gold, independence, luxury, 'a dignified mind, happy old age—everything that makes life worth having—presented by Fortune to parched lips, and wilfully hurled to the ground; maliciously poured into the earth, to be swallowed up by a fleeting palace in a valley,

an *alias*, a *nom de plume*, and an immoral life. Tom, you will never know how all this has cut me to the quick, bowed me down, and humbled your mother and sister who looked up to you."

"Down, governor, down," said Tom, interrupting his father.

"What do you mean?"

"Looked down upon me," repeated the son.

"I say up to you, Tom, and I am right."

"You always are, governor."

"No, sir, not always; I am sometimes wrong, very wrong. I ought to have insisted upon looking into your affairs long ago."

"We have done those things we ought not to have done, and left undone those things we ought to have done, and for which we have got it hot," said the profane spendthrift.

"Yes; you do well to sneer at religion,

at morality,—at everything the human heart holds good and pure and noble,” said Mr. Sleaford, raising his eyes to the ceiling with an air of piety and virtue.

“If you were a model father talking to me like that, governor,—if I believed you believed what you are saying, it might have some effect on me, but—”

“Honour thy father and thy mother,” broke in Mr. Sleaford, “that thy days may be long in the land.”

There was something almost pathetic in the old man’s delivery of the solemn commandment.

“It doesn’t say whether thy father is good or bad,—the divine law makes no qualification; and so sure as you live you will suffer for disobeying it. ‘Honour thy father and thy mother!’ To the All-seeing eye it is enough that they are thy father and thy mother; they are to be honoured, and the son who slightly dis-regards it may not cry over spilt milk,

but his day of sorrow and misery is fixed as the stars, and his time will come."

The father stood before the son, who simply moved his position, pushing one chair a little further off, and lighting a fresh cigar.

"Do you hear what I say?"

"Rather."

"It makes no impression, then?"

"Yes; capitally delivered. You might have a career in the Church, or in Parliament, if you were not too old. I don't know which is best, your action or your eloquence."

Jeremiah rarely got into a passion, but the cool effrontery of Tom Sleaford would have raised the pulse of the meekest father in Christendom.

"Look you, Tom!" shouted Sleaford; "if you don't get up and treat what I say with at least a show of respect, I'll dash this decanter in your face. Get up, you scamp, get up!"

Once moved, the old man grew reckless. He seized Tom by the collar, and dragged him out of his chair. It was the first time he had ever laid a hand upon his son, in anger.

"Hollo, governor, what the devil are you doing? Are you going off your chump?" exclaimed Tom, shaking himself together.

"You swindling thief!" shrieked the father, "how dare you sit there and sneer at me? You mean, miserable scoundrel!"

"Go it," said Tom, retreating a few paces from the angry man.

"I brought you up, educated you, slaved for you, lied for you—aye, and worse," he went on, thinking of his trick with the Martin will. "There is hardly a crime I wouldn't have committed for you; and you reward me with sneers, taunts, affronts, you damned, conceited, thieving puppy!"

The old man stood up to his son, trembling with passion. Tom was silent. He laid down his cigar, and looked at his father without any attempt to conceal his astonishment.

“Yes, thieving puppy, I said. Those were my words. I disown you! You are no son of mine. You are a base, ungrateful scamp. I could find it in my heart to brain you.”

He took up a decanter and flung it down, in his rage, smashing it into a thousand pieces, and then rushed out of the room. A waiter hurried in as Mr. Sleaford went out, and asked if Monsieur rung. Tom said no, and requested the waiter not to show his ugly face there again until he did ring. The servant bowed, and retired. Tom relighted his cigar, and walked about the room with a quiet, steady, contemplative stride. It was something quite new for Mr. Sleaford to lash himself into a passion.

But Tom had goaded him, and the young man began now to wonder that his father had stood his taunts and sneers so long. Tom was one of those born cowards who harass the weak and take liberties with those who give way to them. To submit was in Tom's view an invitation to aggression. He had not a spark of chivalry in his nature. The more Fitzroy Square had given way to him in the old days the more he had domineered over it. As his father consented to be sneered at, Tom sneered at him; and the fact that he knew his father hadn't clean hands in regard to finance and speculation were not temporized by filial considerations. He would not make the sacrifices for his father which his father would make for him. His father was a rogue, and he was not willing to be lectured for being one himself by a confederate, for he insisted upon regarding his father in that light, though he had himself been engaged in dishonest trans-

actions of which his father had not the slightest knowledge.

“ I won’t have him talking like that to me,” he said presently to his mother, who came to him in tears.

“ But he is your father, and in trouble,” said Mrs. Sleaford, laying down a lovely specimen of terra-cotta work which she had just purchased and carried home, to be followed by other parcels of ornamental goods which she thought Patty would like, and which would look “ so nice ” in the drawing-room at home, even if they were ultimately obliged to let the house.

“ If he were my father twenty times over I wouldn’t stand it,” said Tom. “ If I am in a hole, whose fault is it? Am I not his son, and am I not following in his footsteps ? ”

“ No, Tom, you are not,” said Mrs. Sleaford, with more emphasis than was customary with her; “ and if you could see your poor father at this moment

bathing his dear head with eau-de-Cologne, and sobbing, you wouldn't have the heart to say so."

"He wants his head bathing with something. He must be going mad! Look at that decanter, smashed all to pieces. Supposing it had hit me in the face!"

Tom kicked the glass about, and Mrs. Sleaford looked at it a little terror-stricken.

"He's very sorry that he let his temper get the better of him, I'm sure," said Mrs. Sleaford, "but you shouldn't say that you are following in his footsteps."

"I say I am. He let me into the secrets of financing and finessing, and I am a worthy pupil."

"Oh, how can you say so, Tom! Whatever your father may be, he has been a true and constant husband."

"Has he?"

"Yes, he has, Tom. He never kept

a den of infamy and had an *alias*,—there!”


Mrs. Sleaford felt herself grow quite cold.

“Oh, I’ve kept a den of infamy, have I?”

“I will say, if I am killed for it the next minute, that your father was always a faithful husband, and never tired of scheming for his family.”

The good lady rose, and, stamping her foot gently on the floor, she screamed in broken falsetto tones,—

“If I were your father, and strong, I would show you whether you should disgrace the family and then insult us! There! I have taken your part till now; but to see that dear man sobbing and bathing his head, it would make the heart of a worm turn. Oh, you unfeeling, cruel son! Oh, you wicked, disgusting, young man, with your harems and your creatures! I declare my heart is breaking with it all!”



Mrs. Sleaford felt as if she were suffocating. She staggered and fell upon a couch. Tom dashed water in her face, and poured brandy into her mouth.

"Here's a nice go!" said the affectionate son. "I shall cut this altogether. Here, mother, don't be absurd."

She did not move. He lifted her up in his arms and laid her upon the floor, near the window, and opened the door, so as to produce a current of air. Presently she recovered. As soon as she did, Tom rang the bell, told the waiter to go and tell Mr. Sleaford that Mrs. Sleaford wanted him; and then, saying he would go and take a stroll until the storm had blown over, he left the room and went out to play billiards at the *Etablissement*.

CHAPTER II.

“THE TRAIL OF THE SERPENT.”

A DISHEVELLED and miserable-looking couple, the Sleafords, father and mother, sat upon the French sofa and vainly tried to comfort each other. Mrs. Sleaford laid her faded curls upon Jeremiah's shoulder, and he put his arms affectionately about her. It was many and many a long year since they had sat in so loving an attitude. The tears still stood in Jeremiah's eyes. He didn't speak for some time. He could see the loungers on the beach, he could hear the merry laugh of young people bathing, he saw white-sailed craft dancing upon the incoming tide ; it all looked so

gay and happy outside that the scene only intensified his feeling of sorrow and misery.

“I have deserved it,” he said, presently. “I have deserved his taunts and his sneers.”

“To live to grey hairs and hear you say so! Don’t, Jerry, don’t.”

“To live to grey hairs and find your entire family against you, Mrs. Sleaford, that is the hardest cut of all; we haven’t a dutiful child, to say nothing of a loving and affectionate one.”

“Patty is only wilful, my dear. She is good, I’m sure. Don’t let us in our sorrow do her an injustice. Ah, Jeremiah, we have lived long enough, I think, —too long, perhaps.”

Jeremiah sighed, and whisked a fly away that persisted upon biting his hand.

“If Tom had earned the right to speak as he has done to-day, that would have

been another matter ; but a young man who has been living a life of secret debauchery and open dishonesty, and who comes to us a bankrupt, and really charged with being a swindler, it is too much—too much ! ”

“ It is indeed ! It is very cruel ! ”

“ I introduced him into finance, it’s true, and a man who makes his way among jackals has to do dirty work. Mining itself is not clean—even gold ore dirties the hands, and you have to fight with the weapons other people fight with in the City ; and if he combines debauchery with it, and the manufacture of illegal scrip, is that my fault ? ”

Jeremiah’s mixed metaphors rather impressed Mrs. Sleaford with the truth of his remarks, and she was glad that he no longer accused himself ; though the next moment he disappointed her by grovelling metaphorically at Tom’s feet.

“ But that is easily said,” he con-


tinued, with a sigh, “my dear Beatrice Maud.”

“Ah, it is some consolation to hear you call me by that name, Jerry dear.”

“I am not myself, love, to-day,” he replied, as if he struggled against an exhibition of weakness. “If I were a Roman Catholic—which I am not, thank goodness, and I will never desert the Protestant faith, for which our fathers fought and bled, but I can now understand the use of the Confessional—if I were a Romanist, I would seek the nearest priest and confess.”

“Open your heart to Beatrice Maud,” said the faded neutral lady, whose head now almost pressed his cheek.

“Don’t be foolish, Mrs. Sleaford, my love; let us consider our time of life: it behoves us to be dignified, even in our grief. I am not a good man, love; no, I am not: I’m a time server, and some of my business transactions won’t bear investigation.



As I said before, I deserve the abuse of my son; I don't deserve the respect of my children; and I have not been always kind to you."

"I wouldn't say so; on the contrary, dear."

"You are of a patient disposition, love; you were made to bend before the storm; but let us hope we may cultivate mutual love in our old age, and in the retirement of a little house on the Thames, away from the excitement and allurements of London. I am a beaten man, Maudy dear, a beaten, broken man; but it is hard, in the days of our greyness and our sorrow, not to have the sympathy of our children."

"Emily sympathizes."

"Yes, that's true; she opposed us in our schemes for her. If she had married a rich husband things might have been different, because she is clever and would have managed him. But we must not

altogether despair. I have heard that some of these painters make even very large incomes, and I saw a paragraph the other day which spoke very highly of Tavener's work. It was a happy thought of yours, love, the little place on the Thames ; Emmy would keep it going in the summer, no doubt, for Tavener is fond of landscape backings for his figure subjects, they say. He likes to have his people in boats fishing or making love with swans about. That picture which Kerman gave you is worth a lot of money now, and I think you would be allowed to sell it ; the trustees could manage that for you.”

“ Yes, dear ; it would help us to furnish the farm, and might be turned into chickens and things.”


“ Practical as you are fond, my love ; with such a dear wife I ought not to repine. I will not ; I will cheer up, dear ; we will both cheer up.”

“Yes, dear, we will.”

They did. They cheered up over a bottle of champagne. They cheered up over a little joint. They went out and cheered up on the beach. They cheered up in a little sailing boat round the pier. They cheered up in the sun. They cheered up over imaginary pictures of a retired life near Cookham, with a boat and an awning over it, a tow-line, and a punt for fishing. They cheered up with calculations of the ease with which a really pleasant house on the river could be kept up. A cow or two, to give them milk and butter; plenty of fowls to supply them with eggs; corn to make their bread, and mint in the garden ready for the earliest lamb. Jeremiah said he didn't care if he never went into the City again. The Stock Exchange was an unnatural mother; it had behaved brutally to him. He had respected all its traditions, and had both bulled and beared with fearlessness and

daring. If he had taken trifling advantages of the weakness of some of its laws, he had only done what others did and would do to the end of the chapter. Let him get clear of his liabilities this once, and no more City for him. Ambition was over for him, since his children no longer sympathized with his labours. What was gold to him? His wants were few. His wife was a thoughtful, economical woman. Did he go to the City every day because he liked it? Was Mr. Maclosky Jones the sort of man he would select for a boon companion except in the way of business? Did Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson appeal to his sentiments of rectitude on the subject of the position which woman should hold in the world?


It was a delightful relief for Jeremiah to sit in the stern-sheets of the little boat, gliding away before a gentle southern breeze, and talk frankly of the past and the future.



City men, after all, were not his sort. He ought to have gone to the Bar, or devoted himself to literature.

“ We all make mistakes,” Jeremiah continued, with a sigh, “ all of us, however thoughtfully we may consider our course in life at the outset.”

He was too sanguine and too trustful for the City. Men deceived him. He believed in their facts and figures too easily. His nature, though he didn't want to boast, was naturally confiding and honest ; and that was no good in the City. At the Bar, dealing with the affairs of other people, his only desire would, of course, have been to serve his clients. That would have suited his constitutional liberality. Now, in the City, self is your first consideration, and that was the secret of his failure as a financier. Yes, he had failed ; he was ready to admit it. No, he would be frank now. He was not a success as a City man, financier, banker, or



promoter. He had simply mistaken his avocation. It was a sad thing when a young man took the wrong turning in life. But how were you always to know? You stood at the commencement of four branching roads—law, literature, art, commerce. You take Law, as he did. Well, that might have been well and properly followed; but, as you advanced, you came to another turning—a beautiful, flowery-looking highway, with luxuriant hedges, rosy fruits, a soft, carpet-like flooring.

“To the City, Finance and Fortune; To the Gold Mines. You leave the uninteresting path of the law, and take the new turning, and what do you find at the end?”

“A quiet little farm on the Thames,” said Mrs. Sleaford, for Jeremiah paused as if he desired her to reply.

“Exactly; you have every right to expect a palace, with carriages and horses and plenty of money; you find a cottage and a river, a cow or two, and some

poultry. Very well said, my love ; that was a bright thought of yours. A cottage for a palace is hardly what we had a right to expect ; but if we can induce the angel Content to dwell with us, and have Tavener and our dear Emmy down in the summer, we may even yet go gently to our last retiring place, hand in hand, though our only son strives to bring our grey hairs with sorrow to the grave."

"Don't think of him any more to-day, dear : perhaps he will be penitent ; and if he should marry Jane Crosby, I'm sure you would enjoy an occasional visit to your native county."

"True, Beatrice Maud, true ; trouble and poverty seem to enlarge your views : some poet has said that genius is the brighter, like stars on a frosty night, for being pinched a little ; you bear out the simile, dear. If Tom asks my forgiveness, and Jane Crosby should accept him, I will not stand in the way of the

Sleafords being once more a united family.”

“ Miss Crosby is proud,” said Mrs. Sleaford, gathering courage to talk under the influence of Jeremiah’s compliments ; “ she may not like to marry a bankrupt.”

“ My dear, Tom is not a bankrupt ; his bankruptcy was duly annulled yesterday ; the recovery of his estate on the Avon, and the transfer of all his shares in Asphaltes and in the Shipbuilding Company, enabled my own solicitor to arrange that for him.”

“ But there was something else,” remarked Mrs. Sleaford, timidly.

“ The illegal scrip ; as we are alone on the ocean, with sailors who do not understand the English language, I need not be particular, I may call a spade a spade. He forged 25,000*l.* worth of Roughened Asphaltic scrip. My solicitor insisted upon merely calling it an over-issue at the directors’ meeting, and he induced the

Financial Society, which had been extended in numbers and operations, to give it up in return for the whole of my new shares in the Omaha Silver Company. I transferred them; and when my remaining assets are realized to pay the calls on Cemeteries, my Stock Exchange differences, and other things, I shall not have a penny. I am cleaned out; and what is worse, I am no longer a member of the Stock Exchange, nor can I any more do business in Threadneedle Street. However, I need not go into that, love; I am a failure as a city man, and ambition is over for me."

"Miss Crosby might see that paragraph in the papers?"

"She wouldn't understand it if she did, and it only appeared in one journal. It was very good of Roper to get a compliment to me added to the tail of it: that was all he could do when he found they would not withdraw the paragraph alto-


gether. Considering the danger we have had to engineer through, we have reason to congratulate ourselves; we have even got through better than a cat through a skylight, to use Emily's favourite phrase. And Tom, instead of being grateful to me, treats me like a menial, a person to be despised—his own father! If they had prosecuted him he would have been transported for life; and now, instead of playing billiards and smoking cigars in a French saloon, with the sea rolling up to its very windows, he might have been breaking stones with chains on his legs.”

“ Don't, love, don't; it is too dreadful! I don't think he is amusing himself, love; I feel sure he is very miserable, waiting for us to return and make it all up.”

But Jeremiah knew his son Tom better than his mother did, or affected to do. He had spotted his very occupation. Tom was astonishing a crack French player at the Frenchman's own game, and on his

own table. When Tom arranged to meet his father and mother at Boulogne, it was not from any idea that the French seaport could any longer give immunity to him from debt or fraud. He was actuated by a desire for the time being to put the sea between himself and the woman he had deceived, and to try his hand at French billiards. He remembered his triumphs during a short tour in France, and he had been enabled to keep up his practice both in French and English billiards at The Cottage, where he had a billiard-room containing both kinds of tables. He had taught Caroline billiards, and had played many a game with her during his weekly visits to their picturesque home. When the last remnant of his conscience upbraided him for his treatment of the Southern planter's daughter, he soothed it by the reflection that he had divided his last bit of ready money with her. He had a thousand

pounds; he gave her half of it. How bitterly he would have regretted this act of generosity, if he had known that she left it on the floor where it had fallen from his cruel letter; and that Migswood, after laying it down upon the dressing-table, and contemplating it there for some time, had resolved to consider the money as a gift of fortune, in return for all she had suffered in and out of gaol. It was quite an hour before she made up her mind to put it in her pocket and devote it to her own use. She weighed the chances of detection and punishment. It might be “a lifer” if she was found out. She could swear the missus gave it to her. She knew the missus had purposely not touched it, that the broken-hearted woman despised it: she knew and wondered at that. Then she had reviewed her prospects. Once more out of a place, once more cast on the world, and not a soul to appeal to, nobody to employ her at Essam, for she



was a gaol bird, and the horror of the board of guardians who had to keep her children, Migswood decided to run the risk of detection and imprisonment; and Caroline Denton had gone out into the world with her own ten 10*l.* notes, the balance, with a few sovereigns, of the only money left by her father. How she had been robbed of this we have already seen. The conclusion of the incident fell under Tom Sleaford's eyes, when, after pocketing his winnings at billiards, he sat down to smoke a quiet cigar and read the London papers.


“MARYLEBONE POLICE COURT.

“THE NIGHT SIDE OF LONDON.—A too well-known disreputable woman, rejoicing in the cognomen of ‘Irish Moll,’ was charged with stealing ten 10*l.* notes, and 3*l.* 10*s.* in gold and silver, from the person of Caroline Gardner, a married woman, who said she was an American, and whose appearance

in court excited commiseration on account of her prepossessing manners and her evident mental suffering. She said that she had come to London from the country, and that the prisoner at the dépôt (she called the railway station a dépôt, and could not be prevailed upon to say from what part of the country she came) had pressed her to lodge at her house, and, being a stranger and very tired, she had gone with her; that she gave her her purse, containing the above sum, to make purchases at a ‘grocery store,’ and that when she wanted some money afterwards the purse was empty. ‘Irish Moll’ called upon all the saints to testify that, beyond taking the three shillings for the food she was going to buy, she had not touched a blessed farthing. It appeared, however, that Mrs. Maloney, to give the woman her own title, went out under the pretence of returning to give the lodger her supper; that she never returned; and that the

room, in the notorious region of Porter's Buildings, was not her own, but the apartments of her daughter, known as 'Tipperary Kate,' who had returned home drunk, and turned the prosecutor (who had a baby in her arms) out of the house. 'Tipperary Kate,' dressed in the height of Porter's Buildings' fashion, vowed (in spite of the magistrate's repeated request for silence) that she was as innocent as the babe unborn of going home drunk, not a drop having passed her lips for a week; and was it for her to know the respectability of the lady who was enjoying her 'hospitality unknown to her? The magistrate tried to induce Mrs. Gardner to explain how it was she came to be friendless and alone in London, but the prepossessing though mentally-suffering young person only said she wished to be allowed to go. In reply to the question whether she had any money, she said 'No.' The magistrate said he should insist upon her

being taken to the Union until the authorities could make inquiries about her and help her. Whereupon the benevolent Miss Weaver came forward and volunteered to take charge of the young woman and her child until such time as inquiries could be instituted concerning her. Miss Weaver went over to the friendless but interesting young woman, and talked to her in her benevolent way; and the prosecutor eventually left the court with her, the magistrate ordering Miss Weaver to receive ten pounds from the poor-box. ‘Irish Moll’ was committed for trial. Detective Buncher, who had the case in hand, said the prisoner could easily convert the notes. Unfortunately, there were too many receivers in London to leave her any difficulty in this direction. She had in her possession, when taken, 14*l*. The detective said it was quite possible the thieves’ bankers, who had converted the notes for her, had not given her more.



than 15*l.* for them. The magistrate said he was glad to be able to inform Mr. Smithers, who had come to watch this case for the Female Protection Society, that he had, during the course of this morning's business, committed two well-known receivers for trial."

Tom read the paragraph twice over. It would even outrage his bit of humanity to say that he did not feel sorry for Miss Weaver's two new objects of charity. His prevailing emotion, however, was one of fear. He had quite counted upon Caroline going back to America. Latterly she had spoken scornfully of England and of English people. With five hundred pounds she could have no excuse for bringing him into disgrace. Besides, Migswood had told him that she had a lover in America; she had heard her talk of him; she had more than once spoken of him when she was talking to herself, as was her constant habit. Migswood had forced herself somewhat into

his confidence, having seen such varied service at The Cottage, and being in a position at any time to make startling revelations to the latest Mrs. Gardner. Caroline in London, however, was a new trouble, inasmuch as his comfortable return thither, after the settlement of his affairs, formed part of his schemes for the future. Sometimes he had thought her a little mad, and the police report almost contained a suggestion of insanity. It was some satisfaction to see that she had declined to say what part of the country she came from. What a report there might have been in the papers if she had spoken of The Cottage! He wondered, as he smoked, whether it would be a good idea to go to Miss Weaver and “square” her: he had no doubt he could. Or whether it would not be better for him to “cut England” altogether. He knew a fellow who had been obliged to go to Spain, and who was doing very well there, having learned

the language sufficiently well in twelve months to make a business as a broker and importer of English specialities. On the whole, he came to the conclusion that it would be best to see Miss Weaver. If there was any truth in the scandalous reports that were circulated about that charitable person's benevolent operations, he would not find it difficult to neutralize any action on the part of Caroline against him. The missing five hundred pounds also troubled him. No mention was made of that in the police report. Was it possible that Jones and Robinson had cheated her out of it? Quite. He upbraided himself for trusting them. They were equal to the villainy of abstracting the money from his sealed envelope. If that were so, he would recover it. If it were for nothing else, it was worth while calling on Miss Weaver. In the mean time he would write a friendly letter to Jane Crosby, telling her if any of his

jealous friends said anything to her to his discredit, not to believe it until she had heard him. It had occurred to him that Jabez Thompson, who somehow knew everything, might be on his track.

“Some person published a malicious statement about me; you said we could be friends if no closer relationship might exist, and I rely upon your kindly regard at all events. It is true I have had serious losses, and that I must start the world afresh. Many an older man than I, and many a better, has been commercially and financially unfortunate. I am conscious of no dishonour, and I begin the world to-day with a light heart.”

Pausing to think what else he should say, he remarked to himself, “It’s true enough, my first day’s business, since my unlooked-for and undeserved misfortunes, yields me a thousand francs, and I never

played French billiards better in my life."

He went on with the letter,—

"May I hope to be allowed to come and shoot on the First? I know you always have a pleasant little party. If Mr. Jabez Thompson objects to me, ask him to give me a chance of justifying myself in his eyes. I know he hates me, but I assure you it is not my fault. He has formed quite an erroneous opinion of me, and, above all that, it makes me feel very unhappy to think that I am in danger of growing out of your good opinion; and I claim the fulfilment of your word on that night when I disclosed my heart's best hopes to you, that we should always be friends."

Leaning back in his chair and lighting a fresh cigar, he said,—

"I think that will fetch her. I should

like to lick Mr. Thompson, he's such a sly old fox."

Having sealed up the letter, he walked to the Post-office, and dropped it into the box, and then strolled into the hotel to dinner.

"Madame and monsieur will prefer to dine at *ze table d'hôte* to-day," said the landlord.

"That will suit me, too," said Tom.

"They can't bully me there," he thought; "and I'll do the amiable to-night. I was rather stiff on the old man this morning, I expect. By Jove! I never saw him in a real passion before; and madame—*ma mère*—she let me have it, too. Ah, well, it's all in a lifetime, it doesn't matter; a very small bit of soft sorder will settle them both."

He went to his room and dressed. He always dressed for dinner. It was not only an inexpensive luxury, but it was highly

respectable. A man who every day dresses for dinner under all circumstances shows that he has been accustomed to good society. Moreover, Tom Sleaford always said that "a fellow feels more fit" in his dress clothes, especially for billiards. So he dressed for *table d'hôte*, and entered the room with his mother on his arm, looking quite distinguished and wealthy. They "made it up" over dinner. Tom was studiously polite to his father, and deferentially attentive to his mother. He held a conversation in French with a neighbour, and shed quite a halo of fashion about the Sleaford party. Over coffee, in their sitting-room, Tom apologized to his father, and was ostentatiously forgiven; and when he came in early from the billiard-room to have a chat before going to bed, Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford unfolded unto his son a new idea he had for a Discount and Banking Company, which could easily be started with 10,000*l.*, and, retained ex-

clusively in their own hands, could be worked most successfully.

“Unity is strength, Tom,” said Jeremiah, passing his hand over his white and open forehead. “We have never worked for our own hands: be true to your father, Tom; listen to his advice, and with our united experience, and my knowledge of society, our efforts, honestly directed, Tom,—no more mistakes, no more tricks, honest administration in future,—and something tells me that ‘The West End Bank of Discount and Deposit’ might be worked into a great and thriving institution.”

“But what about the little place on the Thames?” Tom asked; “final retirement from the City?”

“I adhere to both, Tom; I never go from my word. Your mother shall let the corner house in Fitzroy Square; we will take the little house on the Thames, and an office in some West End thoroughfare.

I would come to town three or four days a week; you would be there every day; and in the summer your mother and Patty couldn't be dull, because there would be Tavener painting his Thames backgrounds, and Emily rowing her mother on the river; and with energy and honesty, and judicious advertising, I have not a doubt that 'The West End Bank of Discount and Deposit' would prove to us the truth of the axiom, which I always think so comforting, that 'everything happens for the best.'"


"All right, governor, there's no harm in thinking it over and discussing it. When do you propose to go to town?"

"To-morrow," said Mr. Sleaford, with a cheerful glance at his face in the mirror over the mantel-shelf,—“to-morrow, Tom; and we'll sketch out a prospectus ere we go. If a few ornamental names are wanted, I can get them. A couple of clergymen on the direction would be useful; and we

might have a touch of philanthropy in it.”

“ Yes ; benevolence is a good bait, and it pays too,” said Tom, stretching his legs out in the attitude which had been so offensive to his father only a few hours previously.

“ In these days,” said Jeremiah the Enterprising and Benevolent, as if rehearsing a portion of the prospectus, “ when the humblest tradesman is compelled to buy for ready money in order to hold his own against Co-operative Stores,—when small manufacturers find the necessity of financial assistance for the completion of contracts,—when even the working man is compelled to pawn his furniture to meet the increasing demands of necessary creditors,—the promoters have come to the conclusion that they can legitimately help the needy though honest toiler without the desire or the necessity of making a profit on that class of business ; con-



tented, while dealing with larger and more extended transactions, to stoop, on philanthropical grounds, to the aid of their humbler fellow-creatures; conscious, while doing so, they are helping, if indirectly, to advance the interests of the nation at large, and thereby, even from a business point of view, promoting the increase of commercial, banking, and financial transactions. Upon this industrial class of business the directors have entered into an agreement under no circumstances to charge a higher rate of interest than five per cent. per annum !”

“Capital !” exclaimed Tom, “worthy of your old self, governor ; I congratulate you on the return of your business activity. A capital idea ! I shall say good-night, now : I want to get up early.”

“Good-night, Tom,” said the gentleman who had given up finance for ever. “Glad you like the scheme. Your mother’s fast asleep by this time ; I shall sit up for

an hour and make a rough draft of the prospectus, so that we can talk it out with data before us to-morrow. Eh?”

“All right, sir! Good-night!”

Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford sat far into the night inventing his new scheme of banking and finance; and in the interest of provident and successful toilers in the humbler middle class of life, who sought in vain for a profitable and safe investment of their savings, he fashioned a scheme of deposit which should bear a secured interest of twenty per cent. It was quite a delightful discovery to Mr. Sleaford, this idea of the customers of a bank sharing in the profits of its business. “The established institutions of the day,” wrote the new Apostle of Banking, “pay a small and insignificant interest on deposits, and, using the money, make for themselves and their shareholders from ten to even forty and fifty per cent. The West End Bank of Discount and Deposit will accept

deposits for three, six, and twelve months, and pay an interest on the same at the rate of twenty per cent., with bonuses from time to time out of the profits made beyond that amount, thus giving to its customers the full benefit of its successful enterprise, the experience of its manager, and the unique advantages which it possesses for the profitable application and use of money."

It was daylight when he went to bed; and it seemed to him, also, as if the morning of his best hopes were also breaking bright and promising after the clouds of a stormy night. Hope was constant in the Sleaford breast. Dimmed for a moment by misfortune, it only shone the brighter upon the darker background. For Jeremiah Sleaford, as he laid his head by the side of Beatrice Maud's nightcap, the New Bank was as good as in existence. If for the time being he seemed untrue to his faith in mines, he came back to it in his

sleep. He dreamed that he was the sole possessor of a gold region which was bringing him in a thousand a day. Jeremiah was very happy in his sleep.

CHAPTER III.

MISS WEAVER'S RETREAT.

THE enemies of Miss Weaver said she was an impostor.


It seemed a singular freak of calumny to point the finger of scorn at so charitable and so beautiful a woman as the lady of "The Retreat." "Carriages and horses and plenty of money," to quote a Sleafordism, would surely not be engaged in the practical work of charity as a trade. Miss Weaver's friends hardly considered the charge worthy of an answer.

Perhaps the persistent, silent contempt which the founder of "The Retreat" meted out to envious detractors and

libellers rather encouraged than deterred vicious criticism. Miss Weaver would remark in her patient, self-denying way, that while her works were her only answers to slander, the armour of a good conscience protected her from the personal suffering which envious shafts might otherwise inflict. If she had any feeling in the matter, it was one of regret that her supporters should have to endure some of the odium of attacks levelled at her only. She had her own theory about the libels, and she might some day explain it, but not yet. Major Wenn knew that her family were much opposed to what they called the sacrifice of her life and prospects for creatures who should be left to wallow in the gutter. But she had put her hand to the plough, and she would go on.

Miss Weaver's most active enemies found a malicious delight in saying that she was never known to take a girl or woman into her "Retreat," without being sure that the

action would be well advertised. They said it was a point with her to take up a case in the presence of the public. She haunted police-courts, so that when a magistrate found himself in a difficulty with a female prisoner—too helpless to be cast back upon the world, not bad enough to be sent to prison—Miss Weaver would step in and, with a modest deference to the Bench, suggest that she thought the case was peculiar one for “The Retreat.” Or, in the event of an interesting young woman coming to grief through the misconduct of some perfidious man, or when the Society for the Protection of Women had stepped between some foreign girl and a designing procuress, Miss Weaver continually came to the front to relieve Justice from a quandary, and to exercise the practical benevolence of her well-known institution, to which she had sacrificed fortune, health, almost reputation.



It was Miss Weaver's mission in life to help her unfortunate sisters. When her widowed mother turned her adrift, at the age of seventeen, to seek a precarious living as a ladies' maid, she conceived the idea of devoting her life and fortune, one pound and five shillings, to the salvation of deluded girls and unfortunate women. She commenced as a distributor of tracts; and she rose step by step until she became secretary to a society for advancing the interests of domestic servants out of employment. A clergyman, who was evidently actuated by spitefulness and jealousy, professed to be dissatisfied with the way in which Miss Weaver kept her accounts. Indeed, he was so malicious that, as the chairman of the society, he called upon her to resign, under a cruel threat of charging her with theft. Anxious to avoid scandal, and unwilling to injure a most wicked parson, because he had a wife and a large family, she resigned, even

enduring the suspicions of the committee. Their minds had been poisoned by the chairman, who, though he deserved her anathemas, she declared her intention to pray for every day.

There is no knowing how much a truly charitable heart will bear for the welfare of persons with whom it has not the slightest sympathy, of whom it has indeed no knowledge, when the guiding spirit is one of truly Christian benevolence. Miss Weaver, after her great act of self-sacrifice in connexion with the Domestic Servants' Aid Society, found herself the possessor of one hundred and fifty pounds. With a liberality that even touched the heart of the Bishop of Took's Court, she opened an establishment for the purpose of supplying poor women, mothers of families, nurses, and respectable domestic servants with winter clothing and bedding at cost price. The institution was managed by a committee, which

included several gentlemen well known for their philanthropical proclivities. Major Wenn was the secretary and treasurer; Miss Weaver, the manageress. The committee sat once a quarter to receive the report, and to pass resolutions favourable to Miss Weaver and Major Wenn; eventually the society got into financial difficulties, the Bishop retired from the committee, and certain creditors finding that everything had been bought and sold in Miss Weaver's name, insisted upon making the lady bankrupt. Such is the cold, unappreciative conduct of creditors who are not philanthropists! The Court found that the books of accounts were badly kept, and that considerable sums of money were unaccounted for. Miss Weaver, however, appeared before the Commissioner herself, and made a statement which put a different complexion upon the case from that which at first it seemed to bear. A crowd of poor women, whom

she had helped in sore need appeared, several of them in tears, and Miss Weaver received protection and a certificate with sympathetic promptitude. Her unscrupulous enemies shook their heads, nevertheless, and said she was a clever woman, and that she must have made a clear two thousand pounds by the transaction.

Happily, Miss Weaver had a champion. Major Wenn wrote to the daily papers in reply to an impertinent criticism which had appeared, touching Miss Weaver's benevolent schemes. He told her history in glowing terms, and promised the public, for Miss Weaver, a new institution, which would have the support of her former committee, who were prepared to pledge themselves for her honesty and singleness of purpose. Then the selfish opponents of Miss Weaver hid their heads; and by-and-by there appeared in the Marylebone Road "Miss Weaver's Retreat," an asylum for women and children in adver-

sity. There were two classes of inmates, each class carefully separated from the other, each class under separate and distinct management. One side was for respectable women, homeless and friendless; the other for fallen sisters and interesting police-court heroines.

“The Retreat” soon became famous for its excellent management. It was visited by clergymen, praised by magistrates, and described in glowing colours by a smart, descriptive writer, who sketched “London Life and London Shadows” for a popular daily paper. But Satan is a busy enemy. He put it in the minds of cynics and unbelievers to go about and say that Miss Weaver made a profit out of “The Retreat.” “And even if she did,” said her friends, though they denied it, “even if she did, surely the labourer was worthy of his hire; and if the subscribers who kept ‘The Retreat’ going had to pay a matron to manage it, they could never get

so single-minded, so generous, and so capable a woman at the head of affairs as Miss Weaver." Major Wenn told visitors who came to "The Retreat" from all parts of London, told them in confidence, that the fact was, Miss Weaver was the illegitimate daughter of an earl; that she felt her position so keenly she never meant to marry; and that she had, in consequence, dedicated her life to the work of charity. The earl allowed her a thousand pounds a quarter, and this was how she spent it. When a clever writer of gossip in a society paper got hold of this, and made a romantic paragraph about it, Miss Weaver's enemies were dumbfounded. They were silent for a long time, and Miss Weaver was followed by a crowd whenever she made an angelic descent upon a police-court, and rescued a victim from a cruel cell or, what was still more bitter, a cruel and heartless world.

Miss Weaver put her new charges into

a brougham and drove them to "The Retreat." Major Wenn, like a kind, unpretentious gentleman, rode with the driver on the box. Mrs. Gardner took a violent dislike to the Major as he handed her into the brougham. In spite of the depression that possessed her, there was enough active life in her to shrink at the touch of Major Wenn. Miss Weaver, however, exercised a pleasant influence over her. The founder of "The Retreat" was a fascinating woman of thirty-five. Tall, graceful, dashing (but for a certain dignified reserve of manner which was quite in keeping with Major Wenn's account of her origin), she had an air of authority, a somewhat distinguished style. She was dark, though her complexion was inclined to be ruddy. Black, bead-like eyes, a square, strong forehead, rather prominent cheek-bones, an expansive mouth, strong jaw and chin. Her nose was a trifle weak as to character, but the

general effect of the face was handsome ; and when it laughed there was sly fun in it. If you had examined it closely you would have noted a want of repose, a twitching of the mouth, a restlessness of the eyes, and a sort of active desire to keep you occupied, and not give you time to think. She dressed well, usually in black silk, and wore one ring, a diamond set in an ancient fashion, an heirloom which the earl had recently sent her, with a letter, in which he begged her to come to the castle and he would acknowledge her as his child, and give her the position which her merits might command. But the pure, high-minded woman could not be turned from her purpose ; for she had all her father's obstinacy, combined with her poor dead mother's self-sacrificing nature.

The Major was a retired officer of the Indian army, said to be a gentleman of means ; though there were evil reports


even about his financial position. "Be thou as pure as ice, as chaste as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny." Here was a man who had held Her Majesty's commission in the British army; here was a man who had fought and bled for his country; who on the downhill of life devoted himself to the beautiful and holy cause of charity; and there were calumniators base enough in London to attribute interested motives to him! One of Miss Weaver's rivals in charity-mongering had actually stated that the Major lived at "The Retreat" half his time, and that the relationship between him and Miss Weaver was not creditable to the institution. But Major Wenn was not long in bringing that libeller to her senses (shade of charity, the scandalizer was a woman!) by a threatened action for libel. She apologized and paid 10*l.* to "The Retreat Fund," which was duly advertised.

Surely there must have been something


very wicked in the nature of Mrs. Gardner, as Miss Weaver observed a few days after the woman's admission to "The Retreat," for she had actually complained of the treatment she had received from Major Wenn. No well-organized mind could fail to be favourably impressed with the appearance of Major Wenn. He was no military martinet. There was nothing starchy in his style. You would hardly have suspected him to have been a son of Mars. A smiling, talkative, nervous, demonstrative man, he was the life and soul of the committee meetings at "The Retreat." He had pale eyes, pale eyebrows, a puffy face, with a nose a little out of the perpendicular, a pale, lank moustache, a pale imperial, which he pulled with a white bejewelled hand, and a bald head, over which he scrupulously brushed long whisps of hair. He usually wore trousers of the tartan plaid, and a dark frock coat buttoned over his chest.

He spoke in a husky voice, and chuckled in a husky voice at his own small jokes. Here was a man to respect! Did he not carry honesty in his face? Oh, base, unnatural spirit of calumny, to settle down upon the amiable and guileless Major Wenn, the champion of the lovely victim of a cruel world!—a woman who, recognizing an unhappy fate in the bar sinister that blurred her escutcheon, said, “No! I will never marry; I will offer up my maiden life upon the altar of Charity!”

It was, at first blush, a pleasant change from Porter's Buildings to “The Retreat.” Miss Weaver herself conducted Mrs. Gardner to a clean little bedroom in an upper story of the tall house, which had, from a warehouse, been converted into a retreat for the weary and unfortunate. It was a small room at the end of a long passage, which seemed to be an avenue of bedrooms. After she had shown her this



sleeping-chamber, Miss Weaver took her down to her own sitting-room—a cheerful apartment, overlooking a few flower-beds, shut out from the road by a high wall. Baby was asleep, and Miss Weaver persuaded Caroline to lay it upon a comfortable, chintz-covered sofa, where Miss Weaver covered it over with an antimacassar, the weather still being very hot. Caroline looked peculiarly interesting. There was in her eyes a tired, pathetic expression that seemed rather to heighten than otherwise the girlish beauty of her face and figure. She looked more like an Italian girl than an American, and Miss Weaver did not require to be told that her new patient was no ordinary woman. Miss Weaver had laid aside her thin silk paletot, and she was now in a plain black silk dress, with her hair brushed low over her forehead. She had excessively white teeth, and her smile was intended to be ingenuous and bland. Caroline began to like her at



once: Miss Weaver was determined that she should. When Miss Weaver made up her mind to captivate a person, from a bishop down to a policeman, from a shrewd woman of the world down to a waif of the streets, she usually prevailed.

"What part of America did you come from, dear?" asked Miss Weaver, sitting before Caroline, with her back to the light.

"The South," said the new patient, in a gentle and subdued voice, a contrast to the strong but not unmusical tones of Miss Weaver.

"What part of the South, dear?" asked Miss Weaver, kindly but peremptorily.

"I would rather not say."

"Why, dear?"

"I don't wish any one who knew my father to know the condition I am in."

"Your secret is safe with me, whatever it is, but I do not wish you to tell me any-

thing you would rather not speak about. Of course you are married?"

The last question was put insinuatingly, as much as to say Miss Weaver would neither be shocked nor surprised if she were not.

"Yes; and it is to satisfy myself about my marriage that brought me to London."

"That's odd; how do you mean? If you know you are married, I don't see how you desire to be satisfied about it. Don't tell me if you would rather not, but do if you think I can help you."

"I think you can."

"Then don't hesitate: I have great power in London, and I have the inclination to help you."

"When my husband left me he took away the certificate of my marriage."

"You want a copy from the vestry-book?"

"I want to be sure that I am legally married."

"Where were you married?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know!"

"I am a miserable woman," said Caroline, the tears welling up into her black eyes.

Miss Weaver sat down, moved her chair nearer to her, and took her hand.

"Trust me," she said; "tell me all,—it will relieve your mind."

"When we came to England, I and my father," said Caroline, "my father, at a depot on the track, got out to have some refreshment. In our country we step upon the cars while we are moving; my father tried to do so, and was killed. The cars stopped; I thought it was for him to get in, but it was to pick up his dead body."

Mrs. Gardner paused here, and Miss Weaver put her arm round her shoulders.

"He was crushed almost out of recognition. A young Englishman had travelled with us from Liverpool, and my father

and myself had found him very agreeable. He had already changed cards with my father, though my father was reticent and had determined not to make friends in England ; but he seemed to take a great fancy to Mr. Philip Gardner ; so I felt he was a friend when my trouble came, as if I had known him for years. It was a dreadful shock to me, my poor dead father—a dreadful shock !”

“ There, there, don’t distress yourself,” said Miss Weaver, kissing the girl on the forehead.

“ No ; you are very kind, and I have not been used to much kindness lately.”

“ It was a very sad accident indeed,” said Miss Weaver.

“ I think I became insensible under the shock.”

“ No wonder, no wonder, poor child.”

“ It only seemed a few hours, but when I got better they had buried him, the poor dear—they had buried him ; and Mr.

Gardner took me away from the hotel. I had no other friend in the world except one, and my father would not have him as a friend, or let me think of him. He had fought against us in the war. Mr. Gardner was a bachelor, and had an estate in Westernshire, and he took me there. He proposed to marry me. He had been so good I could not find it in my heart to refuse him."

"Did you love any one else?"

"No, not quite."

"You liked some one?"

"Yes, a Northerner, the young man whom my father ordered never to speak to me. We met him in New York, and I only saw him a few times during the course of the several weeks we stayed there."

"Well, dear, go on. I won't ask his name; you might think me inquisitive. Go on, love, go on."

"He explained to me the marriage

ceremonies and customs of England, and said he would prefer the civil contract of registration. We went to an office and entered our names, and we were married ; he didn't care to make a fuss, and he would rather his relations knew nothing about it. We went to London, got married, and returned the same day. Latterly my husband was not kind to me ; he left me, and the house and everything was seized by the law, and when he went he wrote me a cruel letter, in which he said I was not his wife. I was free, and he wished me to go back to America."

"Yes?" said Miss Weaver, a little less affectionately, now that the story was nearly at an end.

"He took with him the registrar's paper, and every record about my father's death—where it took place, and all letters, and everything; and I want to find the office where we were married, and have a copy of the entry made out for me;

not for my own sake, but for his—for Willie's."

She looked at the sleeping child as she spoke, and leaned her head upon Miss Weaver's shoulder. The lady of "The Retreat" rose and moved her chair to its former position.


"That's easy enough. Where was it?"

"I don't know."

"What was it like?"

"An office on a hilly street, with a chapel at the top, and a broad avenue running below."

"We will drive out to-morrow and find it. Major Wenn will help us: he is very clever. I think the place is near St. Paul's, down a court there where odd persons, dressed like piemen, with white aprons, touch their hats, and ask what you require; we will find it, and then you shall tell me all about this Mr. Gardner, and we will see if we can't put things straight for you."



“Don’t tell Major Wenn, please.”

“Nonsense, my dear, he is the cleverest and best person in the world. What I should do without him in this great institution I really do not know.”

“I would rather you didn’t tell the major,” said Caroline, sitting erect, and surprising Miss Weaver with a sudden look of firmness and decision, so different to her gentle, yielding, submissive manner of a few minutes previously.

“Very well,” said Miss Weaver, ringing an electric bell, which was answered on the instant by a hard-faced woman in a cotton dress.

“Send Nurse Belper to me.”

The woman left without a word.

Presently, another hard-faced woman entered.

“Belper, carry that child in your arms, and show this lady to her bedroom, No. 40, on the upper basement, and see that she has everything she requires.”

"Yes, ma'am."

"I will carry the child, thank you," said Mrs. Gardner, rising.

"You are not strong enough to carry it up all those stairs. Belper will take it."

Caroline did not falter under the glance of authority and command which Miss Weaver turned upon her, but went straight to the sofa and took up the child.

Belper looked aghast.

"My dear," said Miss Weaver, "I expect my servants to take their orders from me, and obey them. "Give the child to Belper."

"No," said Caroline, pressing her child closer to her breast; "I will carry Willie, thank you."

Miss Weaver bit her lips; her eyes flashed angrily. She laid her hand upon Caroline's shoulder. It was a hard, strong hand.

"Give that child to the nurse. I am

bound to maintain discipline in this establishment. Take it, Belper."

In an instant Caroline rushed to the door, and was out in the passage, followed quickly by Belper and Miss Weaver. The stubborn young woman was met by Major Wenn, who was on his way to Miss Weaver's little room.

"Hoity, hoity!" he said in his husky though jaunty fashion, while barring the way against the woman and child; "what's all this about?"

Willie began to cry vociferously.

Miss Weaver seized the mother by her shoulders and literally ran her back into the room. Major Wenn and Belper followed. Miss Weaver shut the door, and briefly explained what had taken place.

"Out of pure kindness, major, I requested Belper to carry the child for her, and she has turned upon us both like a tigress."

Caroline trembled with fear.

"Now I call you to witness, major" (the child sobbed and hid its face in its mother's neck), "that I only desire her to allow Belper to carry the child upstairs for her. If it were not for the absolute necessity of maintaining discipline in 'The Retreat,' I would give way; but Belper herself knows I dare not, and I will have her carry that child!"

"What is your objection, young woman?" said the major, going up to her familiarly, and taking her by the arm.

Caroline slunk away, and immediately placed Willie in Belper's arms.

"Number 40," said Miss Weaver. Belper went out. Mrs. Gardner followed her without another word.


CHAPTER IV.

A DECLARATION OF WAR.

THE sentiment of sympathy is not more quickly excited in the female mind than the feeling of aversion.

Mrs. Gardner had not intended to challenge the power of Miss Weaver; but that lady had chosen to see nothing in her conduct but a desire to question her authority, or determination to defy it.


Miss Weaver's instinct had discovered in this delicate-looking, pretty, slight woman a strength of will which seemed to challenge her own. There was an expression of determination in the black eyes



which did not accord with the *petite* figure, the bending, shy manner.

It was as if the good woman and the bad recognized each other; as if the spirit of Virtue said to Vice, "I know you,—you are a wolf in sheep's clothing"; and as if Vice said, "Then you shall feel my teeth if you are wilful enough to discover them to any one else?" Miss Weaver did not feel comfortable in the presence of the pure, searching eyes. She affected a calmness she did not feel. She wished she had never touched the woman. It seemed as if her presence in "The Retreat" was of bad augury. When their eyes met in angry controversy, Miss Weaver felt that a great battle had begun that might fill the whole place, perhaps resound throughout the great city itself.

Two opposite natures had met. They were fire and water. Miss Weaver felt as if it was necessary at once that one should control the other.



Strange that the little, friendless Southerner should make such a deep and serious impression upon the handsome, clever, powerful, and successful Miss Weaver.

It is almost beyond imagination to think that this proud, haughty "daughter of an earl," driving through London in purple and fine linen, should condescend to consider for a moment that poor little woman who had been hooted out of Porter's Buildings to acknowledge her homelessness in a Police Court. But Miss Weaver was always on the watch; her eyes were always busy; her mind was always at work. She saw and noted every straw on the stream, which way it went, where it paused; and something warned her that her new capture for "The Retreat" would give her trouble.

The brave adventurers of old who sailed out into unknown seas, and who penetrated into unknown lands, were not more

wary than are the wicked adventurers of London.

The men and women who live by their wits undertake risks hardly less hazardous in their way than the adventurer of the romantic days who committed himself to fortune, and sought for wealth and fame in unknown worlds.

Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford, Mr. Philip Gardner, Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson, Mr. Maclosky Jones, Miss Weaver—they had, so to speak, constantly to have their hands upon their weapons, ever ready for defence, always prepared for aggression. Any day, an error of judgment, a slip of the tongue, a daring enemy, might pull them down. They had to count chances of success and failure as carefully as any true and noble adventurer who went forth with flags and banners, with drums and trumpets. That their cause was bad enforced a more careful look-out and more discreet observance of omens and warnings.

Miss Weaver was no careless operator, such as Jeremiah Sleaford. She was not vulgar in her vices like Migswood, nor was she a mere picker and stealer of the "Irish Moll" type. On the contrary, she was a feminine Fernando Mendez Pinto—a Tartuffe in petticoats, a siren among men, a saint among women. She made swindling a fine art; trading in charity an engrossing profession. If she had chosen to operate from a society point of view she would have been a princess of fashion; she preferred the severe standpoint of philanthropy, and the *rôle* of a vestal virgin—so pure, so good, that Satan could not touch her. A mystery to women, a delightful example of bold charity to men, the lords of creation found a charm in her innocent daring, her philosophic courage, her utter absence of mock-modesty; and she had a foot and ankle that were perfectly charming. A lady of charity, she had bishops in her train; a woman of

means, she commanded the sceptical. An adventuress of the highest ability, she had spies in her pay ; a philanthropist whose deeds were before the world, she led benevolent disciples in silken chains, and in her "Retreat," the lowly, the humble, the persecuted, the forlorn of her unhappy sex, found a heaven of happiness and rest.

Nevertheless, Miss Weaver was afraid of the most forlorn, most friendless, most miserable of her unknown pensioners. Such is the influence of truth ; such is the instinctive antipathy of the supremely wicked for the supremely good. A devil in the presence of an angel might be supposed to have similar sensations to those which afflicted Miss Weaver under the personal influence of Caroline Virginia Gardner.

"A perfect vixen," said Miss Weaver, when she and the major were alone ; "a wilful, suspicious, haughty vixen."

"Do you really think so ?" said the

major. "What a contrast to my adorable Isy!"

He caught Miss Weaver in his arms and kissed her.

"Don't be foolish, Wenn; I'm not in the humour for kissing. I could have smacked her."

"She's deuced pretty, though."

"Yes, I could see you were admiring her at the Police Court, and she has found you out already."

"How?"

"Didn't you see her shudder at you when you put her into the brougham? Didn't you see her start back just now when you went near her?"

"No, really, poor little trifier, she is a bad judge of character; well, and what is she? Who is she? What's to be done with her?"

"She's to be tamed," said Miss Weaver. "I'll let her see who is the mistress here."

"Is it worth while?" asked the major.

"Yes; I shall like the work," was the quick reply. "She has got up a romantic story about her father and her marriage. I believe she is an artful, designing creature. You should have seen her defy me! 'Take the child, Belper,' I said; 'I will take the child,' she said. 'I am usually obeyed here,' I said; 'take the child, Belper.' The next moment the little vixen flew to the sofa, took the child, and glared at me."

"She has a daring spirit to defy you," said the major. "What a pair of eyes she has! They go through you. She's something like that girl whom Colonel Freebottle took into keeping from here."

"Don't make me jealous of her, as well as mad with her, Major Wenn, or I'll be inclined to strangle the hussy."

"Come in," said the major, in answer to a knock at the door.

The hard-faced woman entered, and

presented, upon a silver tray, a card to Miss Weaver.

“ Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson,” she said.

“ What ’s he like, Curtis ? ”

“ A gentleman,” said the hard-faced Curtis.

“ Show him in ? ”

The major left the room as Mr. Robinson entered.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIGHT BEGINS.

"MISS WEAVER, I presume?" said Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson, holding his hat and cane in his left hand, bowing deferentially, and posing with a languid, society air.

The lady bowed and waited.

"I observe that, with your well-known charitable instincts, you received into your 'Retreat' a young girl and her infant yesterday."

"Yes?" observed Miss Weaver, interrogatively.

"She called herself Mrs. Gardner?"

"Yes. Is she not Mrs. Gardner? Will

you take a seat Mr. (looking at his card) Fitzherbert Robinson ? ”

“ Thank you.”

Mr. Robinson sat down, and glancing for a moment at his gaitered, patent-leather boots, looked into Miss Weaver’s face, which had assumed a quiet, patient expression.

“ She is not Mrs. Gardner, then ? ”

“ No ; the fact is, the poor girl has been deceived.”

“ Indeed ! ”

“ Thinks she is Mrs. Gardner.”

“ Yes ? ”

“ I know her history.”

“ What is it ? ”

“ Well, the story is rather a long one.”

“ You didn’t come here to make me acquainted with it ? ”

“ Well no, not exactly : I came to see if I could be of any service to the girl.”

“ Has she no friends in London ? ”

“ She had not until yesterday,” said

Robinson, smiling ; “ but yesterday brought Miss Weaver to her side—Miss Weaver and Major Wenn—I must not forget the major—and I hope I may add my own poor self as another friend.”

The slight expression of sarcasm which obtruded itself in Mr. Robinson’s manner when he referred to Major Wenn did not escape the ever-watchful eye of Miss Weaver.

“ I am sure the major will feel proud when I report to him, at our next committee meeting, the high estimation in which (looking again at his card) Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson holds him.”

Mr. Robinson rose, smiled, bowed, and re-seated himself.

“ And now, Mr. Robinson, as you are evidently a man of the world, and as you are certainly speaking to a woman of the world, perhaps you will explain your business.”

“ You have described me to the letter.

If you do yourself justice, I may speak to you as plainly as I might talk to a man under similar circumstances—to Major Wenn, for example?”

“Just so ; a woman who holds a medical diploma, who has ridden to hounds, who has been a prison visitor, and who undertakes the care, if not the reformation, of unfortunate women and criminals, is not likely to be shocked with anything a man of the world and a gentleman may have to communicate to her upon any subject.”

Miss Weaver looked boldly at her visitor, and there was an invitation in her eye to talk and fear not.

“You place me at my ease. I will return candour for frankness. I am a bachelor. I have lived in the house where your new patient, client, or pensioner, whatever you may call her, has lived. I know her well. She is a single woman. I don't like the idea of her remaining

here ; I would like to induce her to accept my friendly protection."

" Yes," said Miss Weaver, unabashed ;
" do you know Major Wenn ? "

" Slightly."

" I should prefer your speaking to him upon the subject. As secretary and treasurer, he has his own peculiar views upon cases of this kind ; and he looks for a *douceur*, I believe, to the fund which has so many heavy calls upon it. He has little or no compunction how he strengthens my hands and the power of the committee financially. The philosophy that the end justifies the means is his religion, and ' The Retreat ' has been a holy boon to hundreds of poor lost creatures who have been restored to honourable and virtuous paths by our course of kindly discipline."

" May I see Mrs. Gardner before I speak to the major upon the subject ? "

" Certainly ; I will send for her."

" I would like to see her alone."

“By all means.”

Miss Weaver touched the bell: it was answered on the instant.

“Show this gentleman to the waiting-room in Corridor 5; and inform No. 40 that a visitor has called to see her.”

The attendant conducted Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson to Corridor 5; and Major Wenn returned to Miss Weaver's room.


“Well,” said the major, in his small, affected voice, “what did Mr. Pompous, with his gloves and cane, want?”

“He came about Mrs. Gardner.”

“I thought so. Deuced pretty girl; no doubt about it.”

“He wants to see you.”

“I guessed it. Now I come to think, I know the fellow: he is a City adventurer, belongs to a good family, writes for financial papers, has lots of money sometimes, and sometimes he has none; clever dog,—we must be careful.”



"You must be careful, you mean, Wenn,—you, not us."

"Yes, love, I must. Oh, you are a clever darling, Isy!—a regular Pompadour."

"I wish I were, with you for my king."

"Ah, what a pair we should be! But really, Isy, my own Isabella with the gingham umbrella, you are, don't you know, the cleverest woman in the world."

"But not so deuced pretty as that minx in No. 40," said Miss Weaver, with a smile intended to be fascinating.

"Pretty!" lisped the major, tripping to her side and kissing her hand, "that is no word for your style of beauty; you are simply grand, Isy, you are a queen, a Pompadour."

"What is that noise?" Miss Weaver asked, quickly.

"I don't hear anything," said the major.

“ Yes, a scream ; and somebody is coming.”

The major opened the door and went out, followed by Miss Weaver. They were just in time to obstruct a woman with a child in her arms. In another minute Mrs. Gardner and little Willie would have been in the street.

“ Oh, don’t stop me ! ” gasped the woman, as if she were being hunted by some wild animal ; “ don’t, pray, stop me ! Have mercy ; have mercy ! ”

“ What is the matter ? ” exclaimed Miss Weaver, taking the woman firmly by the arm.

“ That man ! Oh, that cruel man ! ”

“ What, the gentleman who called to see you ?—your friend ? ” asked Miss Weaver, in a tone of great surprise, for an attendant and subscriber to “ The Retreat ” had appeared upon the scene.

"He is not my friend; he is not a gentleman! Oh, let me go; let me go!"

"I fear the poor girl's trouble has turned her head," said Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson, coming up; "she has been very badly used. I don't wonder at her mind being influenced by it."

Miss Weaver put her arm round her as if to protect her.

"Don't tremble, dear, don't be afraid; they are all friends here," said the angelic lady of "The Retreat," whom the venerable subscriber admired.

"You see, Lord Follywell, it is not all sunshine, even here," she said. "Will you kindly step into my room, and you, Mr. Robinson; the major will occupy you, and I will join you presently."

For Miss Weaver to ask was to command. The men disappeared.

"And now," said Miss Weaver, taking Mrs. Gardner by the shoulder and hurry-

ing her back along the passage leading to the upper corridors, "what do you mean by disturbing a respectable establishment in this way?"

Mrs. Gardner did not speak. She hugged her child, and cowered beneath the iron grip of Miss Weaver.

"What do you mean by it?"

"You are hurting my shoulder."

"I will hurt you a great deal more if you play pranks here. You think you can beat me, do you? It is a fight between you and me, is it? You think you can defy me, do you? We shall see."

Along passages, up stairs, through corridors, and at last to No. 40.

"Now, Mrs. Gardner," said Miss Weaver with an offensive emphasis on "Mrs.," "you will be good enough to stay there until I come back, and then you shall explain your conduct; yes, and atone for it, too, madam. I'll show you who is the boss here, as

your vulgar countrymen say; I'll show you."

She pushed woman and child head-long into the room, took a master key from her pocket, and locked the door.

CHAPTER VI.

WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN.

HENCEFORTH, Mrs. Gardner had a hard life at "The Retreat." The lady of charity subjected her to a course of persecution. She hated her. The major would have let "the woman and her brat go about their business." Not so, Miss Weaver. Vice had Virtue by the throat; Truth was at the feet of Falsehood. Miss Weaver took a delight in torturing her victim. She had her removed into the centre of corridor No. 5, so that she could have no communication with the outer world. The room she had first occupied looked upon the street. No. 35, where she now lodged,


had no outlook: it was lighted from above.

“I think they mean to kill us, Willie,” said Mrs. Gardner to her infant, after a week’s entire exclusion from the outer world. “It is very lonely here; I only hope mamma will not lose her senses. I don’t know how long it is since we came here, love. Poor Willie!”

The little one looked pale. Miss Weaver had urged Mrs. Gardner to let the child be taken out, but the woman had resolutely resisted all attempts to separate her from the child.

“Why are you so unkind to me?” she asked, pitifully.

“Unkind!” exclaimed Miss Weaver. “You are a designing, wicked, vicious woman! You thought to usurp my authority, did you? You didn’t know the woman you had to deal with. You are not the first vixen I have tamed, by many!”



"I have only this poor little thing to love and be loved by in the world," said No. 35. "My only resistance to your authority has been to cling to my child."

"Stuff! you opposed me from the first. As we left the Police Court you insulted Major Wenn. What had he done to you that you should shrink from him?"

"Nothing," said the woman, humbly.

"What had I done that you should commit an act of insubordination the moment you enter 'The Retreat?'"

"I did not wish to part from little Willie."

"Was little Willie in question when you scandalized the house, and tried to disgrace it in the presence of a distinguished subscriber and my servants?"

"I am very sorry. That person you permitted to call upon me insulted me."

"Did he, indeed?" exclaimed Miss Weaver, folding her hands upon her knees, and regarding her victim with

lofty disdain. "I should hardly have thought it possible to insult a woman in your position—a cast-off mistress, who is eventually found grovelling in the gutter of Porter's Buildings."

"I did not know where I was," said No. 35, the tears in her eyes, for she was weak, the spirit of resistance having been lowered by a mild diet and confinement.

"Didn't you?" said Miss Weaver. "I doubt it very much, unless you are a lunatic, and I am sometimes inclined to think that is your complaint. Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson assures me that he said nothing to you unbecoming a gentleman."

"I expect I am strange to you and to the people here. I am a foreigner, you see, and you should pity me and let me go."

"Pity you and let you go, so that you may circulate all kinds of reports against 'The Retreat!' I know you, my dear; I

know the sort of viper I have nursed. I tell you again, you don't leave here except with your so-called husband or his friend, Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson, the only persons who appear to know anything of you in England."

"Then I shall die here!" said No. 35, with a gentle firmness, and looking at her persecutor with that defiant expression which irritated Miss Weaver, and stimulated her in her course of torture.

"You may live or die, as you please. That is your own look out. Don't imagine that threats of suicide have any effect upon me: I have heard them before."

"Oh, why do you delight to torture me? Why don't you let me go? Turn me out into the street, and I will bless you. I will never mention your name; I will try to forget it, and all the cruelties I am suffering."

"I dare say!" remarked Miss Weaver, with a contemptuous smile. "You shall

go when you are tamed, and not till then ; no, not if the process of taming kills you."

Miss Weaver rose and paced the room.

"May I not go out for a little fresh air?"

"No."

"My baby will die for the want of it."

"The baby can go out. The nurse shall take it for an airing."

"Why may not I go?"

"You are not fit to be trusted."

"Why?"

"You are crazy; you are violent; you are not fit to be trusted."

"Do you wish to drive me mad?"

Mrs. Gardner asked this question with a quick earnestness, as if she gave vent to a new thought that had just come into her mind.

"I shouldn't have to drive far," Miss

Weaver answered, now preparing to leave the room.

“What do you wish me to do?”

“Whatever you like.”

“Suppose I did all you desired, what is it?”

“Show a proper confidence in me, and not fly in the face of Providence. Don’t pretend to be what you are not; and, above all things, don’t imagine you can dictate to Miss Weaver!”

This is a fair example of the interviews which Miss Weaver had continually with her victim, only that she had not, until this occasion, fairly roused a suspicion in Mrs. Gardner’s mind that there was a conspiracy against her to drive her crazy—perhaps to proclaim her mad. A new light dawned upon her now, and she commenced to rack her bewildered brain upon the subject of an escape. Little Willie had grown querulous of late, and she talked to him now more frequently when


he was asleep than during his fretful vision of wakefulness.

"I have thought it out, Willie," she whispered ; " for your sake, dear, we must get out of this place, and then we will throw ourselves at the feet of the Queen ; she is a woman, and has a fond heart. We must stoop low to conquer, Willie ; we have been too honest, too frank. I know, Willie, I know. We must imitate the Indian, dear, and be crafty. Let us think of the Indian : craft love, craft ! No, I am not going mad, love ; I am coming to my senses. Yesterday I thought I would leap upon her like a tigress at her throat, tear her down, and kill her. My head throbbed then—my head. My hands felt like claws. But that is over now. I have prayed, love, for you, and I feel better ; but I must be stronger, dear, before the time for action comes. If we could once get into the street, we could run ; we could cry, Help ! This is a free country ; we

should be rescued. That is why she dare not let me go out. Don't you see how fearful she is that I might speak against her and her prison? That gives me courage. She wishes to make out I'm mad, that my accusation may not be listened to. She is a bad woman, cruel, bad—wicked as Migswood; she keeps a prison, worse, and calls it heaven! I dreamed of an Indian last night. Craft, craft; seem what you are not. O father! father! why did you die and leave me?"

On the next day when Miss Weaver came in to indulge in ten minutes of verbal torture, and see her victim writhe, Mrs. Gardner received her with unusual deference.

"It is good of you to come and see me, though you do say unkind things," she said, when Miss Weaver had locked the door behind her, and taken a seat upon the only chair the room contained.



"Thank you."

"You seemed yesterday to think that Mr. Gardner might call?"

"Did I? I think not. If Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson has told him how he was received, I should hardly think it likely that Mr. Gardner would run the risk of calling."

"Mr. Robinson has not been again, then?"

"Yes, he has."

"Oh!"

"I suppose you will blame me for not acquainting you with the fact?"

"No."

"Really?"

"I should have had no right to blame you."

"Indeed! What condescension, what justice!"

"I don't like him; but he says he was my husband's friend."

"You don't like me," said Miss Weaver,

"and I am the only person who has befriended you."

"I fear I have been wrong."

"Wrong!" exclaimed Miss Weaver ;
" your conduct has been shameful."

"I expect I misunderstand Mr. Robinson."

"You misunderstand everybody."

"Yes, I think I do."

"I thought you would think so eventually."

"I have not been accustomed to be controlled."

"Do you want to beg my pardon?"

"I do, I do," exclaimed No. 35, flinging herself at Miss Weaver's feet.

"Very well," said the Lady of Charity, raising her, "I will consider about it. I must have proofs of your sincerity given me besides this humbleness. You may kiss my hand."

No. 35 kissed the extended hand.



"Well, what are you prepared to do to prove your sincerity?"

"I will see Mr. Robinson."

"Yes, that's a step in advance. What will you say to him? Complain of your treatment by Miss Weaver?"

"No, indeed, I will not."

"Will you write me a letter? Express your regret, and thank me for my kindness and care."

No. 35 hesitated.

"Supposing I gave you the sitting-room, No. 30, with a piano, and treated you as I meant to have done at first if you had behaved well?"

"I would do all you could wish."


"Very well."

Miss Weaver left the room. Caroline kissed her baby.

The truth is, Miss Weaver had that day received several anonymous threats of exposure. She was accustomed to epistolary stabs in the dark, and had been courage-

ous enough to place some of them in the hands of the police; but this morning a placard, with the word "Impostor," had been posted on the entrance-doors, and a letter of "Inquiries concerning 'The Retreat'" had appeared in a daily newspaper. These incidental troubles harassed her at the moment, more particularly because a police superintendent had called to inform Miss Weaver that Mrs. Gardner would have to appear next week at the Sessions against Irish Moll. It had therefore become suddenly necessary that No. 35 should either be brought into a more friendly condition of mind or worried into a lunatic asylum. She had not communicated her views in regard to the latter contingency to Major Wenn, but she had a plan full of audacious cruelty to compass her end should she be pushed to extremities. Finding No. 35 at her feet was, therefore, an event full of satisfaction to her. Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson had in-

formed Major Wenn that, if Mrs. Gardner would come to Hanover Gate and keep house for him, he would take care of her, communicate with her friends, and be most happy to contribute a handsome sum towards the funds of "The Retreat." The major had informed Mr. Robinson that it was quite a common thing for Miss Weaver to receive bank notes for hundreds and thousands without a line or a word, anonymous donations for the great cause of charity. Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson had said he had the greatest confidence in the major, and that he would do anything in the world for Mrs. Gardner. The major had informed Miss Weaver that Robinson was in luck, that he had lots of money; and Miss Weaver had said she had only one hope now, that Mrs. Gardner would, of her own free will, leave the institution under the protection of her friend; such an arrangement would meet the case, and relieve her of a difficulty. Major Wenn



feared the girl would never do that, "so deuced obstinate, you know, like all pretty, dark-eyed women." Miss Weaver thought she would.

"I was to show you into No. 30, the sittin'-room, marm," said the hard-featured Belper.

Mrs. Gardner followed her.

A dainty luncheon was laid. There was fruit upon the table, and wine.

"Miss Weaver said you were to help yourself."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Gardner.

Willie stretched out his hands to the grapes.

"My darling," said the mother, "you shall have some."

The little one devoured the grapes and cooed.

"We must be careful, Willie," said the mother; "taste the wine first, that's what Indian would do."

She tasted the fresh, cool claret. It was

pleasant to the palate after a course of bad tea and water.

"I think it is good ; but we mustn't be poisoned, Willie," she whispered.

"Chicken and salad, Willie ; we are in favour, you see. And we must eat and drink to get strong, love."

She sat down, the child upon her knee, and ate the luncheon with the relish of a hungry woman.

There was a piano in a corner of the room ; in another, an easel, canvas, and paints. Mr. Robinson had told Miss Weaver of the girl's accomplishments. Mrs. Gardner looked at these marks of delicate attention, first with delight, then with suspicion, then with fear.

As she expected, Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson was presently announced. Her heart stood still for a moment, but she rose to receive her visitor with apparent ease and calmness.

"Miss Weaver said you would receive

me. I need hardly say how proud I feel," said Mr. Robinson, his hat and cane in his gloved right hand. "I have only called to pay my respects, and to ask if there is anything I can do for you."

"You are very kind. I think not," said Mrs. Gardner.

"Nor for the dear little boy?" asked Mr. Robinson, looking at Willie in his mother's arms.

"If you could induce Miss Weaver to let me take him out for a little walk," said the woman quickly; but, correcting herself as quickly—"no, on second thoughts, pray don't; she may think I have complained, and I have no desire to do so."

"Pray command me," said Mr. Robinson.

"Have you heard anything more of my husband?"

"Nothing that I should care to tell the woman he has deceived."

"I would like to know."

"He has gone abroad with a lady," said

Mr. Robinson, uttering a suggestive falsehood.

“With a lady?”

“Ah, my dear madam, I only wish I could persuade you to think as much of me as you once thought of him. But, there, I must not touch on forbidden ground; only say that I may call again, that is all, and I will trust to time to make us better friends.”

“Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson,” she said, “I will be glad to see you again. I only wish I were as free to come and go.”

There was an invitation to parley in the woman’s manner which caught Mr. Robinson at once.

“You might have all the freedom you could desire if—pardon my boldness—if you would extend the smallest amount of friendship to me.”

“I was very rude to you, I fear?”

“No; that would be impossible. Mrs. Gardner could not be rude.”

"Yes, I was, but you have forgiven me; this visit tells me that."

Mr. Robinson's vanity, to say nothing about the mad passion this pretty, uncommon woman had excited in his selfish nature, made him an easy prey to the woman's wiles.

"Forgive you! I love you!"

"You must not say that," said Mrs. Gardner, trembling with fear, but nerved to her bold plan of escape. "I cannot listen to it; not yet, at all events."

"You give me hope! My dear Mrs. Gardner, what shall I do to prove my devotion?"

Mrs. Gardner was in her turn taken off her guard.

"Have you a carriage?"

"Yes."

"And where is it now?"

"At the door."

"Instruct your coachman to take me and my little Willie for an airing?"

"I will. Excuse me a moment; I will return immediately."

He left the room. Mrs. Gardner drank a glass of wine.

"We must keep our courage up, Willie; even the Indian needs fire-water. Oh, Willie, how my heart beats!"

She walked to the window and looked out upon a small forest of chimney-stacks.

"A city of bricks and smoke, Willie! Is it really as cruel and hard as it looks? Heaven protect us!"

She gave Willie a teaspoonful of wine. He made faces at it, and then smacked his lips.

Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson returned. He looked crestfallen. He stammered.

"She won't let you," said Mrs. Gardner, quickly. "I knew she wouldn't. I'm a prisoner here—a prisoner, sir. 'Command me,' you said. I did. You are re-commanded. You thought you were somebody. You see! But hark! hush! what

am I saying? Forget what I have said. I don't want to offend Miss Weaver, nor to make you think me foolish and unkind. But, oh, it is hard to be locked up here!"

Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson raised his finger in an attitude of warning. He heard a well-known footstep. Miss Weaver knocked at the door, paused, and entered the room.

"I am very sorry, Mrs. Gardner, that you have made a request which is against the rules of 'The Retreat.' I would have liked to show you that my sentiments towards you are kindly, but discipline must be maintained. The request, however, and the very significant way in which you have received your friend induce me to say something which may perhaps save time, and relieve Mr. Robinson of his apparent embarrassment in making a proposition which I think redounds to his credit, and which will help all of us under the circumstances."

Miss Weaver took a seat, and motioned to Mr. Robinson that he should do the same.

“May I lay little Willie upon the bed?” Mrs. Gardner asked, for she felt sure Miss Weaver was going to say something which would try all her strength of dissimulation, and something which she would not like even her speechless child to hear.

“Certainly, yes; anything you wish.”

But Miss Weaver left the room with her; and then Mrs. Gardner changed her mind, for she had a morbid fear of letting the child be out of her sight. They might steal it, she thought.

“You are indeed a whimsical person,” said Miss Weaver, but ill concealing the annoyance she felt at this continued evidence of mistrust. “She thinks she is fooling me,” thought the wily Weaver: “we shall see.”

CHAPTER VII.

MR. FITZHERBERT ROBINSON WANTS A
HOUSEKEEPER.

"Now, Mrs. Gardner, listen," said Miss Weaver. "Mr. Robinson is a gentleman of means and reputation ; he wants a housekeeper ; he knows your husband, and seems to be the only friend you have in London ; he tells me he is willing to give you that position at a good salary, and I wish to ask you if it is an offer you care to entertain."

"Pardon me, Mrs. Gardner," said Robinson : "Miss Weaver is a very business-like woman ; she puts the matter very directly and without sentiment. Will you

permit me to add that, in advertising the vacancy, I described the engagement as that of a lady-housekeeper who would have a staff of servants, her own apartments, and every possible consideration of respect, and I—”

“Thank you,” said Mrs. Gardner; “I understand. Would you allow me before I answer you to have a few words with Miss Weaver alone?”

“By all means.”

“Then I will show I trust you by asking you to wait at the end of the corridor and see that nobody touches my child. I am going to lay him down upon the bed. Will you?”

“You honour me,” he said.

She saw she had conquered Robinson.

Mrs. Gardner went straightway into No. 35, the door of which Miss Weaver had left open. The Lady of Charity followed her. She had not seen the knife the desperate woman had concealed—a

knife which had been brought up with the luncheon.

"Mr. Robinson, stand by that window, will you, please, till you see me return for Willie."

"I will," said Robinson, looking defiantly for the first time at Miss Weaver.

"Mad as a March hare!" said Miss Weaver, still looking ahead. Her plans always stretched away into the future.

"Now, madam," said Miss Weaver, when the two women confronted each other alone, "after this new mountebank exhibition, perhaps you will begin."

"You want me gone," said Mrs. Gardner.

"Not more than you want to go."

"You hate me," said Mrs. Gardner, the wine stimulating her. She had not tasted anything stronger than tea for more than a week.

"Not more than you hate me."

"I don't hate you; let me go freely,

and I promise you never to breathe a word of this disgraceful intrigue."

"I don't understand you."

"Yes, you do."

"I lie then, do I, you vixen?"

Miss Weaver stepped towards her panting opponent. The desperate woman clutched the knife.

"Woman!" exclaimed the American, "be careful!"

Even the bold Weaver paused, though she only saw the flashing eye and the distended nostril of the Southerner, in whose attitude there was a suggestion of the tigress.

"Is there no way for me to leave this place but with that man? Answer me straight, and let us understand each other."

"If you will sit down, and talk like a rational being, I will listen; if not, I must leave you."

While she spoke she saw the knife.

Miss Weaver was no coward. With the rapidity of thought, and the strength of a man, she seized No. 35 from behind. There was in her method of attack all the deftness of a woman who had been a nurse in a lunatic asylum. Mrs. Gardner was powerless. The knife dropped out of her hand. She was cowed. She looked up at the giantess who gripped her, in fear, as a child might have done.

“You theatrical hussy! Now, what have you got to say?”

“Nothing. Forgive me: don’t tell Mr. Robinson; don’t make a noise,” gasped the victim.

“Very well then, listen; for I don’t intend to waste any more time upon you.”

“Yes; I am listening.”

“You decide at once whether you leave ‘The Retreat’ or stay; you leave it at your own written and expressed request with Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson, as his house-keeper, or you stay.”

"Suppose I stay, what will you do with me?"

"Give up the institution to you, hire servants to wait upon you, let you live in luxury, give you the right even to call Major Wenn your intimate friend."

Mrs. Gardner shuddered at the malicious way in which Miss Weaver hissed this into her ear.

"You didn't think I should be so kind as that, eh? Did you think I'd starve you, lock you up in darkness, never let you see daylight, take your child from you, drive you crazy—so crazy that you'd have to be chained up in a cellar, and finally buried in a ditch?"

Miss Weaver bent over the terrified woman, clutching her by the shoulder and glaring at her, hissing the cruel words into her face.

"O don't, pray don't!" exclaimed the victim. "I'll do what you wish, whatever it is."

The moment Miss Weaver relaxed her grip, the woman fell back into her chair all pale and limp.

"Here, none of that, no fainting, rouse yourself," said Miss Weaver, shaking her.

"Yes, yes," said the woman, making a mental effort, and staggering to her feet, "I know. Don't touch me; I will go: give me a little wine; I am weak."

Miss Weaver poured out half a tumbler of wine. The poor woman drank it eagerly.

"Thank you; tell Mr. Robinson I will go with him."

"Very well; now sit down and compose yourself."

Mrs. Gardner sat down.

"You had better go to your room and lie down for half an hour. I will send you up a lace mantle and a few things. I would like you to go away comfortably. I don't bear malice, though you did try to stab me with a knife."

"I!" said the woman; "I try to stab you?"

"Do you deny it? Do you call me a liar again?"

"Oh, no, no!"

"I don't blame you; it is easy to see that you are not quite answerable for your actions."

"Forgive me," said the woman. "I will go to baby. Tell him I am ready; tell him, will you?"

She went to her room. Mr. Robinson was strictly guarding the portal. He bowed to her as she went in, and then he walked to the sitting-room. Miss Weaver had beckoned him.

Little Willie was fast asleep. Mrs. Gardner flung herself down by his side, and tried to pray. Presently she got up.

"He cannot hear me in this vile place," she said; "God has left it. He will not look upon it any more than he would upon The Cottage. And oh, Willie, the craft of

the Indian is no good against the devil! She is Satan in the guise of a woman! We must go, dear, if we would escape starvation, chains, and death. Oh, she is cruel; there is torture, murder, in her cold eyes. Once outside this prison, this den, we will trust to Providence. Better to die in the streets and be buried in a ditch, Willie, than here. Pray Heaven I keep my senses! I will; for your sake I will."

She crept by his side and shut her eyes.

"I will try and sleep. I must not lose my strength; I shall want it soon. O Heaven, give strength to my will, and wings to my feet."

"She accepts your offer," said Miss Weaver to Mr. Robinson.

"The darling!" exclaimed Robinson.

"If you please to call her darling I have no objection; I thought it was house-keeper."

"You are so witty and cynical."

"She will be ready this evening at dusk."

"Delightful! I have to thank you, Miss Weaver."

"Not at all; it is nothing to me. She is a lonely and friendless woman. I rescued her from starvation and infamy. You are her husband's friend—her only friend in London; you offer her honourable employment, she accepts it."

"Just so—most business-like; thank you."

"You will order your carriage to be here at eight o'clock. You will call for the lady and her child; in the mean time she will have written to me informing me of her intentions; you will also have sent me in writing your application in regard to her; then No. 35 will be vacant; and I trust Mrs. Gardner will, through your charitable interposition, find her friends, and be happy ever afterwards. There! Does

not that make quite a touching and romantic story ? ”

“ It does, truly. You should join the staff of some popular magazine, and write novels.”

“ My dear Mr. Robinson, I have gone through all that. I have been a journalist, a hospital nurse, I have my diploma as a doctor, I am writing for two scientific journals at this moment, and I have ridden to hounds as straight as the huntsman himself.”

“ You are a wonderful woman ! ”

“ I should not be here otherwise.”

“ True.”

“ Now, a word of warning about Mrs. Gardner. As she enters your carriage we shall give her no chance of running away. See that you are equally cautious when she arrives at your house. Do you understand ? ”

“ But do you suspect that—”

“ I suspect nothing,” replied Miss

Weaver. "But this woman is erratic, and for some reason or another she dislikes me. Her mind has been influenced against me; if she could create a scandal about 'The Retreat' she would. When I give her into your care, all I ask is that you shall really take her home; keep her there four-and-twenty hours, and then she may say or do what she pleases."

"I quite understand."

"If she attempts to run, take hold of her arm; clutch her tight. A scandal would do you no good."

"Good! Just now it would do me a great deal of harm."

"Very well, then, pay attention to what I say."

"All right; I'll take care, never fear."

"Then you shall come to the office and write me that letter."

"By all means."

They returned to the sanctum of the Lady of Charity. Major Wenn was there,

drawing out cheques for the signature of Miss Weaver. Mr. Robinson wrote the letter which Miss Weaver required, and when it had been duly addressed and placed in Miss Weaver's hand, Major Wenn went out with Mr. Robinson to luncheon.


Mrs. Gardner was sitting by the barred window, above a forest of chimneys springing out of acres of roofs dingy with smoke and soot. She was soothing little Willie, who would burst into fits of crying, every tear that rolled down his cheeks paining the suffering mother more than if it was a drop of her heart's blood. Cruel London might have done its worst with her but for little Willie. She talked to him, kissed him, prayed that Heaven would comfort him. But she prayed without hope. If she had been looking upon the green meadows of Essam, she might have fancied she saw some glimpse of light in the darkness of her fortunes. But

London seemed to stare her in the face, hard and grim and cruel.

“And this,” she said, “is the land which your grandfather described as tender and chivalrous! This is the country that sympathized with the South in the hour of its trouble! This is the land that stands by the weak and defies the strong! This is the land flowing with milk and honey! Oh, Willie, Willie, how we have been deceived, betrayed to our destruction! Let your own little heart pray for mamma, dear! In your baby-language, ask the angels that whisper to you to guide mamma this day, to have her in their keeping this once, dear, this once.”

And she mingled her own tears with those of little Willie, who suddenly looked up at her and smiled.

“My darling!” exclaimed the mother, “you understand me, sweetie, you do: you have said something to the angels; they have answered you.”



Baby cooed, and put its little arms around the mother's neck.

"Bless you, my own! my angel! Let me kneel and thank your companions with wings, your playmates whom I cannot see."

She knelt with little Willie in her arms. A gleam of sunshine fell upon the woman, and dwelt lovingly in the room. She took the dancing light as another omen of good promise; and, when the hour came for action, she was calm, self-possessed, and resolute.


CHAPTER VIII.

THE GARRISON MAKES A SORTIE.

Now it came to pass that on the day when Mrs. Gardner was to make a sortie from the Weaver garrison that Mr. Henry Brayford was in search of the enemy who was the besieged woman's convoy in friendly disguise.

It was a siege to Mrs. Gardner, this shutting up in "The Retreat." She was invested by Miss Weaver and Major Wenn. Her liberty was dominated by redoubts; her movements were under constant surveillance.

While she had agreed to march out under convoy, she was only meeting craft




with stratagem. Her surrender, as a prisoner of war, to one of the besiegers was, after all, only a sortie for liberty, an effort at escape, a determination to fight when the convoy was beyond the immediate lines of Major Wenn and his ally. Mrs. Gardner had laid her plans. But she had a triple alliance against her, and the offensive forces were far-seeing, daring, and unscrupulous.

If Mr. Brayford had only known how hard beset the poor woman was! He lived in the neighbourhood of "The Retreat." But he was not only ignorant of the case; he did not even know Mrs. Gardner; he had never heard of her. How should he have dreamed even of that hand of fate which was reaching over the broad waters of the Atlantic, to gather into a circle the lives that are bound up in this narrative, when he was putting his trust in Jeremiah Sleaford, and waiting for the shower of gold that was to

come out of the Pactolean clouds of the Financial Society? Poor Brayford knew nothing of the mysterious hand that had directed those Southern fugitives, deluding one to his death, and delivering the other into the hands of the Philistines! Yet the shadow of that distant ship gliding out of New York harbour to battle with "the rolling forties" fell upon our early pages. The historian was enabled to picture to you the gentle, trusting, but fearful girl clinging to the side of her grey-headed, distraught father; to show you them, coming over the sea to influence the destinies of men and women in England of whom they had never heard; bringing with them the silken threads of romance necessary to the web of this story of real life, to be, in their turn, weaved into the plot which Fate had designed beforehand; one of them to contribute a thread of sombre blackness, the other to supply skeins of varied hues, and, unsuspected in her gloomiest mo-

ments, to be the innocent cause of a tragic stain in the golden web.

Who shall venture upon a controversy with Fate? Who shall dare to challenge her stern decrees? To say that it might have been better for Caroline Virginia Denton, and her father, to have stayed in their own country is to be guilty of an arrogance that pretends to lift the veil of the future. Who knows what other ills might have beset their path; what greater, bitterer trouble might have tortured their existence! Moreover, it was ordained that yonder suffering woman, praying for deliverance from the snares and pitfalls, the pirates, thieves, and murderers of Cruel London, should bear her cross in the great city. She had a mission. The threads of her influence are black, grey, golden, and red; and as we stand upon the brink looking into the Future, it seems as if Fate had another minister standing darkly by her side, with ven-



geance in his eye; but he looms up, too shadowy yet for recognition, his face is strange, and his form is shrouded in a mist.


What can a poor creature such as Brayford have to do with Fate, or Fate with him? It may be that this ungainly comical person is destined to play the part of the angel, for whose aid the victim of "The Retreat" was praying. For it is certain that Brayford is within the shadow of the fortress, and Fate had arranged that he should be in search of Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson at the severest moment of Mrs. Gardner's peril.

When Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford was reviewing the past and discounting the future at Boulogne, his memory failed to carry the slightest reminiscence of Mr. Brayford. The fact that he and his colleagues had utterly ruined Brayford quite escaped his thoughts. No man could have been more thoroughly and com-

pletely ruined than Harry Brayford, the comic epitaphist and the melancholy farceur! As a mural mason he was wiped out. Not a single cemetery company would recognize him. Monolith Cottage was levelled to the earth. The Mausoleum and Marble Works at Paddington had been remodelled by the new proprietors. They wouldn't even employ Brayford. They said he was as big a tom-fool as his clerk, "the Wonner," as Brayford called him. The serio-comic countryman who had amused the Janitor at the office of the Financial Society, and who had delighted Mrs. Kester with his attentions at a certain reception, was now an out-at-elbow nobody. The Syndicate, the Cemetery Company, and Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford combined, had left him stranded on the inhospitable shores of Cruel London.

At first Brayford had accepted the situation with a light heart. He sought

consolation at the Footlights. But it was here that he first thoroughly realized his misfortunes. The Footlighters who owed him money cut him for fear he would ask to be repaid his loans; those who had cultivated him with a lively hope of sums to be borrowed, snubbed him because their chances were at an end. The club generally seemed to agree that he was a fool; that he had frittered away a fine business; that he had peddled in literature out of vanity, and neglected work he understood; that but for his money he would not have been tolerated; that he had introduced a lot of men into the club to serve his own private ends; that he had, in fact, used the club; that he had been ostentatious in his hospitality; that properly considered, he had really no qualification for the club; and that altogether he was neither entitled to sympathy nor respect. There were a few members of the Footlights who did not hold



these views. The chairman was a notable exception; so were the secretary and treasurer. But this did not compensate Brayford. The shock he had received overwhelmed him. He went to "the boys" for comfort; they jibed him. He asked them for the bread of consolation; they gave him the stone of contempt.


But a worse discovery than this of the uses of money was the revelation that his little farces and comic songs had only been accepted because he was "a good fellow, you know, and it's easy just to push a first piece in now and then,—it pleases him, and he don't want money." When Brayford turned from the grave and the comic epitaph to the solemn farce and the sad comic song for the means of a livelihood, he was laughed at by the very men who, over little dinners at the Albion, or drinks at the club, had praised his songs and listened to his satirical three-

act 'In Memoriam.' Besides, he had neglected his dress; he no longer wore gloves, his beard was unkempt, his hat was greasy, his boots were not clean, he showed his poverty in the careless tie of his cravat. Brayford was literally "broke," as they would say in Lincolnshire; "stumped," as they put it in London; "in the gutter," as he said himself to his old friend "the Wonner," who spent the spare pennies he could scrape together in buying newspapers and cutting out the "deaths" for circularization. "The Wonner" thought his old chief was simply "up to his larks," that the sale of Monolith Cottage was a kind of pantomime joke, and Mr. Brayford's poverty something intended to be just as diverting as the many other numerous eccentricities of which he had been guilty. The only incident of the new phase of their lives that puzzled him was the occasional want of sufficient food. This bothered "the

Wonner," but not half as much as it bothered Mr. Brayford.

On the day when Mrs. Gardner was to make her sortie from "The Retreat," Mr. Brayford had heard that Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson had profited largely by his downfall. He never liked Robinson. On the contrary, if Brayford's mild nature was capable of supporting the passion of hatred, he hated Robinson. He had not only heard that his former colleague had made money out of the sale and re-sale of the Paddington Works, but that, if he chose to give Brayford employment in connexion with a little business which Brayford had started, he could keep himself and "the Wonner" continually occupied. He had, therefore, vowed he would see Robinson that day, for "the Wonner" had complained for the first time since their troubles that he was hungry.

Mr. Brayford had called at Robinson's



office, in the City, three times; he had followed Mr. Robinson to his club; he had been on his track all day. He walked along Regent Street, as the shops were all closing, towards Hanover Square, with the intention of posting himself outside Robinson's house until he came home. He was hungry himself now, and the little money owing to him and "the Wonner" for their last job was not due until the morning.

As he turned to go into the square, Mr. Robinson's brougham passed him, and he saw his old colleague's face in the light of a gas-lamp. He ran after the carriage, and stopped with it opposite Mr. Robinson's house. His hunger goaded him. It made him angry to see his former colleague with a fine carriage and horses, while he grovelled, as he had tried to explain to "the Wonner," in the gutter. At that moment he hated Mr. Robinson even more than he hated Mr.

Jeremiah Sleaford and the entire Sleaford family.

The handle of the carriage-door was cautiously turned. A footman leaped down from the steps, and opened the door of the house with a latch-key.

Mr. Robinson stepped from the brougham, and proceeded to hand out a lady with a child in her arms.

Brayford noted all this as he stood in the shadow of the carriage-lamps.

Instead of taking the hand carefully held out to assist her, the woman bent her head, darted beneath Robinson's arm, and ran with the speed of an antelope.

Robinson and the footman were after her in a moment, and Brayford after them. The woman screamed loudly as Robinson caught her. He seized her savagely.

The next moment he was sprawling in the road, and the footman as suddenly

found it desirable to run to a place of safety on the other side of the way.

A cautious policeman, who had witnessed the incident, noticed that the person who had been knocked down gathered himself together as if to resent the attack. He, therefore, walked quietly round the next street, so as to enter the square from another point.

When he came back to the scene of the disturbance, the combatants were no longer there. The woman was gone; the child was gone; their champion had disappeared. All was quiet at the house of Mr. Robinson. No carriage stood at the door. A group of people at the corner of the street were talking about a fight. P.C. XX marched courageously into their midst, and demanding "What's up?" also in the same breath requested the loiterers to "Move on!" But the little crowd declined to obey the latter injunction, though it was very communi-

cative in reply to the former. P.C. XX took out a book, made some notes, wrote down several addresses; and presently Hanover Square resumed its ordinary appearance.

END OF BOOK V.

BOOK VI.



BOOK VI.

CHAPTER I.

A WORLD OF SNOW AND TWO LOVERS.

“HE saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth,” and silence reigns over the valley. The squirrel seeks his sheltering nook. The quail, halting upon the wing, falls dead in the cañon. Glittering spears hang upon the mountain crags. The river pauses in its course. The trees moan in the night. The firs are black. They look like funeral plumes. The sky is a dull leaden pall stretched over the face of nature.

The miners of the Sacramento Valley

huddle together and strengthen the timbers of their rude dwellings. They bid each other "Good night" with an extra grip of the hand. They feel that on the morrow many of their huts may be as far apart as if they were divided by mighty seas. The air is filling with feathery particles of snow. The sky is being gradually shut out. All the world is hushed, as if hill and dale, listening to the Divine command, waited its solemn and sure fulfilment. "He saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth."

On the morrow an awful silence comes, more appalling in its stillness than the rush and war of a tempest. Dead silence broods over a world of snow. Trees of snow. Hills of snow. White mountains tower up to an unseen sky. The valley creeps in snowy undulations up to the mysterious rocks. It is the picture of a dead world, buried.

A calm monotony of hill and dale,

without a ragged edge. Every corner has been rounded. Even the trees, which thrust their branches into the chilly air, have the mound-like form of all natural protuberances. It is a world of snowy hillocks, a mighty graveyard, with feathery plumes that moult sprays of frozen swan's-down.

In a well-built hut in Decker's Gulch, among the lonely Californian hills, two miners sat by a glowing pine-log fire. The locality had been named after its fortunate owner, who had recently sold it to a party of capitalists in San Francisco. The purchasers were to enter upon possession in the spring. In the mean time winter had seized the property and fixed an icy seal upon its golden treasures.

Tristram Decker sat propped up with skins and pillows upon a rude bench, with his thin hand in Jack Kerman's brawny fist, on the first night of the great snow of this winter season, in the mountains of the

Sacramento. A long, poetic face, full of lines and tokens of a hard life; blue, sanguine eyes; a spare, bony figure; long brown hair; hollow cheeks, with a hectic flush beneath the eyes; Tristram Decker was the wreck of a powerful young man. Our old friend Kerman, broad of shoulders, strong of limb, tall, stalwart, with his frank face half hidden behind thick whiskers and beard, was almost a cruel contrast to the nervous, wasted figure of Decker, the enthusiastic lover whose face his persecuted countrywoman thought she had seen, in the days of her loneliness and trouble, looking at her over the hedge in the English valley of Essam.

It was Christmas Eve. Not alone the silence of the snow and the chance that they were both in a living tomb, but the time itself made tribute upon the best and noblest instincts of their nature. Tristram Decker believed he was dying of consumption. He expected his end was near,

though he continued to say he would not die until he had seen Old England. He had, nevertheless, his hours of depression when he feared that physical weakness would exhaust his strength of will. This was one of his bad nights. He had been talking to Kerman about the end. He had been sorrowing over the prospect of his companion being left alone in this wilderness of snow.

"If I could only pull through until the weather clears," he said, speaking slowly and in pain. "It is hard, after all your kindness, to leave you by yourself. I've been a deal of trouble to you, Jack, but you'd rather have me stay, for all that, dear old boy."

Kerman pressed the hand that lay in his as gently as if it had been a woman's.

"I think," continued the invalid, "I think I shall have to go in a day or two, Jack, and I want you to get used to the idea of it. Don't be afraid, as I should be

if we could change places, when you wake some morning and find me lying still."

"You're depressed to-night. I have put these thoughts into your head by talking about Christmas," Kerman replied.

"You must cheer up, old boy; it's the nature of your illness that makes you gloomy; and, instead of being cheerful and helping you to keep your spirits up, I've been dumpy and miserable."

"No, no, Jack; I think you are the best fellow in the world. They talk of the tenderness of a woman by a sick-bed, but your gentle patience couldn't be equalled by any woman—except one, perhaps—except one."

"Ah," responded Kerman, "we never know how much good there is in women; fact is, we don't understand them; they're so true and stanch that they go on being heroines, and keeping it a secret all the time somehow. I suppose a man is naturally such a selfish fool that he hasn't the

heart or the sense to see what a woman's at."

"Now you're thinking of Jane Crosby," said Tristram.

"I'm always thinking of her."

"And I of Caroline Denton."

"God bless them both!" said Kerman.

"Amen and Amen!" exclaimed Tristram.

The logs on the fire settled down, and sent a cloud of sparks up the chimney. They looked like a swarm of golden bees.

"Your Christmas fire wants to join in our good wishes," said the invalid. "How fond you are of the fire, Jack. Tell me about your dear old country. It seems to me as if I have got to know England through this fire of yours. I've lived all my life in a land of stoves, and your fire-side is like poetry to me, something in a story, like all your English history, with knights and castles in it, and always

green valleys, old homesteads, and dreamy, moss-grown villages. I wish I'd gone to England when I left New York, that is, if I could have come across you in your own country."


"You ought to have been a poet, Tristy," said Kerman. "What brought a fellow like you fighting Indians and digging for gold is a puzzle to me."

"Tell me about your English firesides, Jack," said Tristram, his eyes fixed upon the red-glowing logs. "Perhaps Caroline Denton is sitting by one of them. I should like to think so,—sitting with her grim old father. Ah, he was a hard old man, was 'Secesh Denton,' as they called him. It wasn't my fault that I was a Federal soldier; it was the chance of birth. A man can't help it if he's born in the North; everybody can't be born in Maryland or Virginia. What we are born at all for is a mystery to me. But talk of England, Jack, the only place where, it

seems to me, it's ever really Christmas. When I was a boy I always used to look at the pictures in the books and papers my father got from England, and read the ghost stories and about the yule-logs and things, and the Christmas bells ringing across the snow. There's plenty of snow here, Jack; we only want the bells, my boy,—we only want the bells. I hope she has got a fireside to sit by, Jack, don't you?"

"I do, old man; and I feel sure she has."

"He said he'd sooner kill her than she should marry a man who had lifted a rifle against his beloved South; and when I said if I had known him and his daughter I would have forsworn my birthright rather than have offended him, he only shrugged his shoulders impatiently. How was I to know he and she were living away out there in Virginia when marched with the boys against the rebs



You talk of beauty, Jack; you should have seen that little Southern girl. My God! And I loved her as if I made up for only knowing her a fortnight by putting a lifetime into those fourteen days. Let's have a drink, Jack."

"We will, old man, we will," said Kerman, rising, and fetching a bottle of brandy from a rough but capacious cupboard; "a'jorum, a hot old glass of grog, Tristy; and we'll wish ourselves all the good things of the season."

He hung a kettle over the fire; he brought forth glasses, and a jar of lime juice.

"I've got one of my talking fits on, Jack. It's rather rough on you; but you won't talk, and somebody must keep the game alive on Christmas Eve. Perhaps you'd like a hand at cards, Jack? Let's play for the chest, and the claim, and the Gulch, and the hut, and the whole lot; that'll wake you up."

"No, Tristy ; cards will wake me up no more."

"I shall not forget the night when you stood between me and that murdering thief at Sharky Nat's hell. You're a brave fellow, Jack ; you don't know how brave you were that night. You English fellows never do know. You ought to have been laid out that night, Jack."

"I expect I did," said Kerman, measuring the brandy and lime-juice, and pouring it into a jug.

"You saved my life, and how you got off without a knife in your heart or a bullet in your brain, hang me if I know."

"Luck, old man, luck," replied Kerman.

"I'm going to walk about a bit," said Tristram, getting up from his cushions and skins. "I'm going to help you brew the punch."

"That's right," said Kerman. "Bravo !

we shall make a merry Christmas of it yet. Get me the sugar, Tristy."

The American staggered a little as he crossed the floor of the cabin, but he opened the cupboard, and struggled with a great jar of sugar, which he managed to place upon the table.

"By the sacred stars and stripes, Jack, I feel ever so much better than I did two hours ago. What a wonderful thing if I should get better!"

"If you should get better? You shall, old man; you shall," said the Englishman, ladling the sugar, with a wooden spoon, into the jug.

"But supposing, Jack, I should get better only to find that we are buried alive. You don't know what snow means in the Sacramento, my dear friend. You don't know."

Tristram spoke solemnly, and looked into the face of his friend.


"And is that how thou art going to talk



just as soon as thou gets a bit better? Thou 'rt a nice Job's comforter, as owd Kester o' the Manor Farm in the Marsh would say."

"I like to hear you do that dialect, Jack, because I know you are happy, thinking of your native land. I should like to see it. I suppose old Secesh Denton did take his daughter across; he said he should in another name, and that they should forget and be forgotten. I was a poor devil then, or I should never have left the track of them; and I only came out to this claim in the hope of getting money enough to find them and make them rich, without them knowing where the gold came from. That was my plan. For I don't think that bitter old cuss had a thousand dollars left out of all he was once worth."

The American had sat down again while he was talking, and Kerman had brewed the grog.



“Now, old man,” said Jack, “let’s wish each other ‘A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.’”

They each took a steaming tumbler of punch, which Jack poured out, and repeated together—“A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.”

“That’s the regular thing,” said Kerman, jug in hand. “Now, then, we’ll drink to Jane and Caroline, married or single, God bless them!”

Kerman’s voice trembled, and Tristram said,—

“God bless them!” adding, “married or single. That’s got too much bitters, Jack.”

“You Americans like bitters,” said Kerman, “and I’ve begun to think they’re good. I heard a fellow sing a song at the Footlight Club in London, called ‘Life’s a bumper, filled by Fate,’ and I often think Fate’s given you and me an extra dose of bitters; but it’s better to take ’em straight

and not complain; so I say, married or single. I've every reason to think Jane is married. I know Miss Caroline Denton's happiness is all you care for; and women do get married, Tristy, old man, and there's snow and ice and seas between us and the girls we love. It's true your little lady knows you love her. My great-hearted Lincolnshire lass doesn't know I care much about her—I didn't know it myself before it was too late. Ah, well, it can't be helped. I expect we're a couple of old fools, Tristy. Now I'm jawing away like a Yankee orator—no stopping me once I'm set going, and I wanted you to do all the talking to-night."

He drained his glass, pulled out a pipe, lighted it, sat down, and commenced to smoke.

"I don't think your ideas of love exactly fit in with mine," said Tristram, musingly.

"Have a cigar," said Kerman, "and tell me your ideas."

"Yes, I'll have a smoke. How many cigars have we?"

"Oh, plenty," replied Kerman, going to the cupboard and bringing out a handful—"plenty to see us into the spring."

"Plenty, because you leave them all to me. I believe you'd swear you hated brandy, if you thought there wasn't enough for both of us; you're a queer, generous old cuss, Jack, that you are."

The American lighted his cigar, and the two men smoked silently for some time, looking into the fire. They pretended not to notice the hissing which the red logs made every now and then, telling of the continued falling of the snow. The fire-light threw weird flashes upon the rough wooden benches upon the blackened hearth, and up among the multifarious tools, cooking utensils, dried fish, hams, herbs, and kettles that hung upon the cross beams beneath the tarred timber roof.

"Look here, Jack," said Tristram,

presently. "The better the day, they say, the better the deed. I've made my will. I wish I'd done it before the snow came, because I guess it'll be a long time before Old Chump or any of 'em get up here from the Red Indian bar or the camp down yonder, and I wouldn't wonder if they're not all buried down there before the week's out. I knew what I was about when I prospected this claim, and fixed on Landell's Corner for our brown stone front. Trust an old hand! I guess we're two of the richest men in California; at least, one of us will be, Jack—one of us. Hand out your pens and paper, I'm going to sling ink."

"No, no; sit quiet, and let us talk."

"I thought I was the boss here," said Tristram, with an acted air of authority.

"You're the boss; yes, old man, you're the boss."

"Very well, then, I tell you I'm going to sling ink, old John Bull. I've made

my will, and I'm just going to write it out. It's not exactly a will; it's just to show I've no title to the gold nor the claim, and that it is all yours, Jack. Pull it out, John Bull, and let us have a look at it."

"I'm going to do what you ask me, Tristy, just to please you and pass the time, that's all, mind. I'd rather you didn't write anything, and I don't want you to look at that dross. It seems to me that we ought to be thinking of something more serious than money matters. I'll bet a trifle there will be no opening the door in the morning."

"Serious! Now there's a crusty old cuss. I never was more serious in my life. Money! Don't despise money."

"If it could buy us a track down to the camp, a highway into the valley, and a free passage through the snow, I would worship it. I have known what it is to have money, as much as a man could

want, but not more than a fool can spend."

"I thought you had. I guessed it long ago, but you are as close as a clam; you will never tell a man about it; you're all alike, you English fellows who come out here, you've all got some secret along, and you chew it like a Yank, with an everlasting quid in your mouth."

"Oh, no, it's no secret. I had a heap of money left me. I was an ignorant, conceited chap, and I went to London with it, to be a gentleman, and I worked at being a gentleman, as hard as you and me have worked together getting these chests filled."

"London!" mused Tristram. "I'll never see your London, Jack."

"You needn't want to, though you'd know how to deal with it. I thought I did, but London's like one of the flash women at Frisco—fine to look at, cruel as—"

“The snow,” said the American. “D’ye hear how it hisses in the fire? And I thought I heard the wind; hope not.”

“Crueller than the snow, Tristy, because you know what the snow means; it looks you hard and cold in the face, and begins to wall you in and spin your winding-sheet. But London cheats you all the time; it robs you on the score of friendship; it will trample on love, and everything men and women hold dear, for money; and when you’ve got no money left it jeers at you, and leaves you to starve. One day, my boy, I was rich, the next day I was poor. I went to the docks and bought my passage to New York, gave the agent 100*l.*, so that I couldn’t touch it, and then I went to have a last look round; I thought I’d try what London was made of. I went to a swell club, which my money got me into, I borrowed 10*l.* of a man, just to pay a billiard debt, hadn’t my cheque-book

about me, I said. He gave it me at once. Then I went to a dear friend, to whom I had rendered many services, told him I was ruined utterly beyond hope, and begged him to lend me 100%. He asked me if I thought he was a fool, and turned away. Presently the man who had lent me the 10% came, and hemmed, and hah'd, and said, on second thoughts, he wanted that ten-pound note himself; the other friend had split on me. I took the trouble to listen to the conversation of three or four men in the smoke-room. I stood in the shade behind the screen. They said I'd come to grief at last, and served me right. My affected generosity was damned ostentation. I was a pretentious agricultural booby. I hadn't the courage to come out and acknowledge their compliments; I sneaked away through the busy streets, with the lights flashing, went to the docks, and got into my berth. The next day we dropped

down the Thames, and I was happy. I'd done my best to make others happy, and I seemed as if I'd just earned my liberty."

"I like to hear you talk," said the American; "let me get into my bunk, Jack, and then talk me to sleep; I feel like that; but tell me about that old house where you were reared, with the fire on the hearth, and the dog and that girl, and the old woman."

The American turned into his berth. Kerman trimmed the oil lamp, put another log on the fire, brewed more punch, relighted his pipe, and talked all the time to his friend, who lay dozing and listening like a child soothed by an old wife's story.

"It's all so different in England, old man, everything's finished—the land is under regular cultivation; as for that old kitchen at the Manor Farm, there's nothing like it on this side. At Christmas

we used to bring in a great log and pack it on a red coal fire. You could sit in the ingle nook, and there was a great kettle singing on the hob, and Jane would come in and help Kester to make a great spiced bowl, hot and steaming, with dried apples floating on the top; and the farm men would sit round the fire; and then the waits would come and sing about the Babe of Bethlehem, and—”

Here Kerman paused. The American was sleeping calm and still. Kerman went to the door. The entrance to the cabin was half blocked up with snow. A bank of it three or four feet high fell in upon him. He covered Decker up to protect him from the wind, and then attacked the snow with a shovel. He now wished that they had engaged men to help them in the Gulch, or given some of the miners at Nipper's Creek a share of the claim, so that they might have had neighbours to help him in this battle with winter. It

was hard work, one spade against a world of snow. But the English miner worked with a will, until long after midnight ; and daylight brought ample evidence of the hard necessity of his labours.

CHAPTER II.

USELESS TREASURES.

BUT the daylight brought no change in the aspect of nature. The snow continued to fall, and Kerman renewed his attack upon it, keeping a clear space in front of the hut. Hope is courage, and Kerman put the strength of both into his shovel.

“It can’t go on snowing for ever,” he said; “and we have plenty to eat and drink.”

“But if the wind gets up the snow will drift, and, all of a sudden, we may have a mountain upon us,” said Tristram.

The two men were having breakfast, and it was Christmas Day.

"Well, we can only die once, Tristy," said Kerman.

"We don't want to die yet," said the invalid.

"Why, last night you were going to square up with Crossbones almost at once."


"Yes; it was one of my bad days, but I was quite right about the will, and while you've been shovelling at the snow, like your friend, Mrs. Partington, with the mop at the sea, I've just written it down."

He took from a pocket-book a sheet of note paper, and read to Kerman his last will and testament, which gave to Kerman the entire claim of Decker's Gulch, making him the vendor to the San Francisco Company, and stating that all the gold in the chest at their hut belonged to the same man, who had got most of it with his own hands. There was only one condition, Kerman was to go to England, find out old Secesh Denton, and convey to him, in some way that would not wound his pride,

the value of at least one-third of the property.

“I’ll tell you how you’ll do that, Jack. You’ll go to New York, and get hold of a clever lawyer, a judge. His name is Clinch; you’ll easily find him. He is a square, downright fellow. He knows Denton. You’ll tell Clinch that he’s got to make the fiery old reb. believe that the Government has restored to him in money a part of what they stole from him. That will satisfy his pride. You’ll go to one of those jewellery stores, and buy something for her, with my name engraved on it, and if she’s married, see her husband, and ask him to let her wear it. And, if the old man is dead,—I’ve thought it all out, you see, like a lawyer,—why, the money is hers. You’ll manage that; and if anybody has behaved cruelly to her, or deceived her, or done her a wrong, you’ll avenge her for me.”

“How do you mean, Tristram?”



“One day in the summer—the very day you struck that lode which has made you so rich, I was sitting out by the corner, wondering why the Almighty should have given all the beauty of the earth to the Indian, and, having done so, why he should let us come and tear it up for gold, when I saw a face look out at me from the ‘brush’ that covers that side of the mountain. It was her face, and it looked so sad and mournful that the tears came into my eyes as I gazed upon it. The reality of it was so intense, that I did not doubt but Caroline was there before me. I went towards her. It was only a face, and it faded away as I approached it. That was an appeal for help. It was not death. She would not come then, because she would know there would be two deaths if she did. It was poverty. It meant that we were to work at the vein we had discovered. It meant that the old man’s money had run out, and that I should be

quick and get rich and go to his aid. That is how I read it. And it meant more; it signified that she was true to me, that I might still hope; and so, Jack, while you were thinking me a money-grubber, a keen, selfish Yank after gold, I was working for her."

"And killing yourself, as I have told you often enough."

"No, no, the seeds of my disease were laid in long ago, and I wasn't going to let you do all the work. I was too selfish not to want to feel that I, having won some of the money, had the right to give it away."

"Why, isn't the claim yours? Was it not yours from the first? And am I anything else but an interloper?"

"Bear with me, Jack. I want to tell you everything, so that you will be well posted if we should be separated. Do you know why I say 'if,' this morning?"

"To make up for being so contrary about it last night."

"No! I dreamt this morning—and I believe in morning dreams—that I was getting well, and that the doctor, up from the Indian bar, came and said I was wanted in London, and that he laughed at me when I said I couldn't travel so far, and I woke with his last words in my ear—'You'll go to that there London!' he said,—you know his rough, uneducated style,—'you'll go to that infernal Babylon, and have a rare old time.'"


"Good for old Bolus," said Kerman;
"and I believe him."

"Then we understand each other?"

"Hope so."

"But you think I am strange, and your practical mind don't sympathize with visions and dreams."

"I don't know; I never had much experience of them, but a year or two among these mountains would make me a



believer in spirits and the rest, there is something so solemn in the look of the world about here."

"Hush, a moment."


Decker went to a small cupboard in a corner of the room. Three drinking glasses placed in an inverted position upon one of the shelves were carefully examined. They emitted sounds. He closed the cupboard.

"I knew it," he said.

"Your weather-glasses are at work, eh?" said Kerman, with a smile.

"It's an old test. Inverted glasses on a shelf placed like that foretell storms of wind. They sound an alarm. On the coast where I was brought up it was infallible. We are going to have a storm of wind."

Kerman went to the door. The snow had ceased to fall. The sun was getting up behind them. A grey mist brooded over the vast expanse of hill and dale.



The sun seemed to dwell upon it. A fog-bow appeared in the sky; and beneath it the form of a cross.

"Come here, Decker, quick!" cried Kerman.

Decker hurried to the door.

"What 's that?"

"A phenomenon peculiar to mountainous countries. It is common in the Arctic regions and in the Alps. In the Hartz they see spectres. But I've never seen the figure of a cross before."

As he spoke, the phenomenon disappeared. Kerman looked anxiously at Decker.

"What 's the meaning of it?"

"It 's an omen."

"Of what?"

"That God will not desert us. It is Christmas Day. He sends us the great sign-manual of His goodness, the Cross of Christ."

The face of the American lighted up as

he spoke with a sublime expression of tenderness and hope.

Kerman bent his head reverently.

“Let us go in, Jack, and pray. Don’t let us be ashamed of our feelings; don’t let us be afraid to speak to God in each other’s hearing. We shall want His aid before long. Your shovel will be no good against a tempest of wind.”

They re-entered the hut.

“You’ve upset me, Decker. I feel as if some calamity was about to fall upon us.”

“Why, you look frightened, Jack.”

“I am frightened.”

“It is strangely quiet, is it not?—no sounds of life, not even an echo from the Indian bar, not a sound from Nipper’s Creek. It may be that we are the only living people this side the Gulch. Did you notice that part of the mountain, where I saw her face in the summer, had slipped away?”

"No; how do you mean slipped?"

"Jerked right away into the valley; Nipper's Creek is below there. Boss Maggs and his crew are down on the river, I shouldn't wonder, under ten thousand tons of rock and snow.

"And this is Christmas Day," said Kerman.

"Shut your eyes, Jack, if you're ashamed to be a man, and confess yourself less than Him who sent the bow and the Cross, and say your prayers to yourself."

Decker knelt by a chair. Kerman went out into the open air, and looked in the direction of the mountain of which Decker had spoken. The whole side of the ridge appeared as if it had given way. It had left a dark patch behind, and in the valley below there was no longer any trace of Nipper's Creek.

"Good Lord, have mercy upon them!" exclaimed Kerman.

That was all the prayer he said.

"Maggs and his lot are done for," he said, as he went back into the hut.

Decker had dragged out before the fire the chest of gold.

"I thought you were going to pray to God, and I find you're worshipping the devil," said Kerman.

"This is not the devil."

"Put it away, Tristy. I hate it."

"Why?"

"Those fellows would have been alive now, but for this infernal thirst of gold."

"No; they might have been killed trying to rescue drowning men at sea. No, Jack, gold is God, if you use it well."

"Don't be profane. Just now I felt a certain amount of security because you could pray, and I was awkward at it, and now you are insulting God, for didn't the heathens set up a golden calf instead of Him?"

"Nonsense, Jack. He planted gold for

us to find, and He gives it to some men without taxing head or heart to show His contempt for it. When rightly used, He blesses it; when wrongfully dealt with, it carries a curse."

Decker paused as he spoke, and, taking up a piece of gold larger than the others, he said,—

"Why, Jack, there's blood upon this; and on this!"

CHAPTER III.

FIGHTING THE TEMPEST.

KERMAN took the ore from Decker's hands. "It is not blood," he said. He wiped it upon his coat-sleeve. "It is the redness of the earth where we got it."

"Yes, I see," said Decker, taking it from his companion, and dropping it among the rest in the locker.

"Your manner is very strange to-day, Decker; put the stuff away."

"I have been thinking of our riches ever since daylight."

"Our poverty, you mean," said Ker-
man, as he commenced to clear away the
remains of their breakfast.

"Poverty," said Decker, smiling; "do you know how rich we are?"

"I know how poor we are," said Kerman.

"I tell you, man, we are wealthy beyond description; rich enough to buy Monte Cristo's cavern of gems, if there ever was such a place."

"I never heard of it," said Kerman, putting away the last article of crockery-ware which formed their breakfast-service.


"Did you ever read about it?"

"Never."

"Ah, Jack, you have many pleasures to come."

"I hope so."

"Do you know that our shares in the gold of Decker's Gulch, and the veins which belong to it for two miles round, may yield us fifty thousand dollars a week? We are the possessors of an El Dorado. Do you know that we have



found the Philosopher's Stone? I don't think you realize it, old man."

Kerman pulled out his pipe, filled it, lighted it, and commenced to smoke.

"If I die, Kerman, you will be one of the richest men in the world. Think of it, man! You will be a Midas—a Croesus; you will possess the purse of Fortunatus."

"Boss Maggs had a pretty good pile of gold in his bunk yesterday," said Kerman.

"Boss Maggs!" exclaimed Decker, impatiently. "Why you don't think this chest of gold bears any comparison to what we've got? You've told me of your English farmers showing samples of their grain in little bags. This trifle of ore, Jack, is only a specimen of the bulk. You should have seen the face of the San Francisco men when I showed them one lump of it! Why in a few months from now, Jack, the country for miles round

our property will swarm with prospectors and miners seeking for a mere streak of the gold we have got in layers."

"Yes, I understand that you have made your fortune," said Kerman, "and that I have enough to enable me to begin my genteel studies again with a good balance."

Kerman never could speak of his London experiences without a sneer. He emphasized the word genteel with a contemptuous wave of his hand.

"You can't be a true gentleman without having read 'Monte Cristo,'" said Decker, smiling; "and you certainly will never understand the power of money without studying it."

"Is it a work on fashion, etiquette, banking, or what?"

"On all three," replied Decker, in a patronizing manner, which he sometimes assumed towards his companion.

"If Maggs had read it, would he have been alive to-day?"

“Not unless he had had as good a partner as you have, then he might.”

“How’s that?”

“Maggs didn’t understand the first principle of mining, where to fix your quarters. Now we are perched in the safest nook of the whole region.”

“Yes, we are perched,” said Kerman.
“That’s just it.”

“Well?”

“Why, anything like that landslip which has settled Maggs’s lot would wipe us out; we shouldn’t have time to say good-bye.”

“Bah! the fog-bow has unnerved you, Jack.”

“It has,” said Kerman; “and I’ll tell you what it is, dear boy: I can’t sit here any longer and see you finger that infernal dross; put it away.”

He put down his pipe, and laid his hand upon the lid of the chest, saying, “Don’t you know this is Christmas Day? You

seem to have forgotten it all in a few minutes. Just now you were praying, and now you are selling your soul to the devil."

Decker rose to his feet, and allowed Kerman to close the lid and drag the locker into its accustomed place.

"There, now sit down, and let us talk."

"All right, old man. You are right; when I begin fingering the gold it changes me—it seems to fire my blood. Jack, she shall walk on it; she shall have golden staircases; her house shall be a house of jewels. She shall have silks from India, furs from Russia, diamonds that have been cut for the queens of Europe, gems from the temples of Eastern gods."

Kerman had twice seen Decker under the morbid influence of this mad passion of gold and love. Once before the young man had worked himself up into a wild paroxysm, in which he had alternately prayed and cursed. The unexcitable Eng-

lishman thought it best to resist this craze by prosaic remarks, or a phlegmatic disregard of Decker's ravings.

"Supposing she's married, like my Jane?" he said.

"I'll buy him," replied Decker, quickly.

"Buy him?" observed Kerman. "That's a queer idea."

"Yes," said Decker, seating himself cross-legged upon a rude wooden chair, having his arms on the back, resting his chin upon his arms, and looking straight at Kerman, "I'll buy her, if necessary. If I live, nothing shall separate us."

"You can't buy people, Decker."

"Money can buy everything and everybody."

"Not an honest woman's love."

"Something so much like it that you can't tell the difference."

"But supposing she is married, and loves her husband?"

“She couldn’t love him.”

“But if he refused to give her up?”

Decker stood up to emphasize what he was going to say. “I’d kill him!” he exclaimed; “I’d shoot him.”

“What, for loving a woman whom you couldn’t resist yourself?”

“Kerman, I would shoot him,” said Decker, his eyes flashing, his frame trembling.

“And then I should lose my friend and partner,” said Kerman, smiling, and pretending to treat the whole matter lightly, and as if Decker was joking.

“How, Jack, how?”

“They’d hang you.”

“Who would?”

“A judge and jury.”

“What! hang a man with his hands full of gold? Put away one of the richest men in the world?”

Decker laughed derisively at the bare

suggestion of such a disregard of the influence of money.

“By the Lord, Decker, they’d hang you in England if you owned all the gold-mines in the earth! Damme, I think they’d hang you all the more on that account.”

“Would they? Then I don’t think much of your civilization.”

“You’re not in earnest, Decker?”

“I am.”

“What! do you call it a proper use of money to bribe Justice?”

“Why, certainly, if Justice stands between you and the woman of your choice. To have gold, Jack, is to have the master-key. Listen, old friend, I never was more serious in my life. I’m going to do whatever I please, if I live. If I die, the talisman is yours and hers. I would coin my heart for that woman, pawn my hopes of heaven, and when I say that, you can understand what it means, for you have

seen me pray. Do you know why my soul is in such a whirl to-day?"

"No."

"Shall I tell you?"

"Yes."

"I am better. That is one reason. My cough has not troubled me for four-and-twenty hours. I believe I am going to recover. And I am suffering from remorse." He paused, and sighed.

"Well?" said Kerman.

"I ought never to have left her. I ought to have followed in her footsteps, and watched and waited. By this time she might have been mine."

"She may be yet."

"Another obstacle is growing up between us now that I am getting better."

"What obstacle?"

"Do you hear the wind?"

A low moan sounded far away in the distance. Again the snow hissed on the burning logs.

“That,” said Decker, pointing to the fire, and alluding to the snow, “and that,” nodding his head towards the door, “the wind more particularly.”

“I thought you didn’t care for one or the other.”

“I blame myself for letting her go,” he replied, as if speaking to himself. “I wasn’t selfish enough. Love is selfish—real, true, absorbing love. Its yearnings are selfish as the grave. Mine was not love. I should have taken her from her father. I could have done so. If she had been mine, only for a week, and we had then died, that would have been life. Yesterday, I had given her up. To-day, I am strong. God has given me new life, and with it gold that opens all doors, clears all paths, commands everything except the tempest. And it seems as if He was about to snatch away the cup just as I am thinking of being able to raise it to my lips. There! That’s

what I mean, Jack. I'm not so mad as you think me."

He took a cigar from his jacket pocket, sat down, and commenced to smoke.

"Yes, that wind isn't a comfortable visitor," remarked Kerman, reflectively; "and the snow's come on again. I must tackle it just now. What bothers me most, Tristy, is the weight of it that's accumulating on the top of the hut."

"Oh, that'll slip away; don't bother about that. What we've got to fear is the wind driving a drift upon us. You can get at the wood-stack still for the fire?"

"Yes; I've kept that clear so far."

"Things might have been worse. We don't suffer much from the cold, and we've plenty of provisions. In the Arctic regions you have to chop your liquor with a hatchet, and boil it before you drink it; your beard freezes, and is hung with icicles; and if you take up your gun

thoughtlessly without several gloves on your hands, the skin peels off upon the weapon. We are saved all that."

"Yes," said Kerman, "there 's always a deeper hole than the one you 're in."

He went to the door as if to answer the knock of a visitor. It was the wind that shook it. He opened it. A cloud of snow entered, driven by a gust of wind.

Darkness fell upon the hut.

"And it is only twelve o'clock," said Decker.

"We shan't forget this Christmas Day in a hurry, Tristy," said Kerman, sorrowfully.

"I think we shall, Jack, old man," replied Decker, now as much depressed as he had previously been excited.

"There 's nothing to be done?" said Kerman, in a tone of inquiry.

"It might be as well to board up the window," said Decker. "That was nothing

you heard just now, only the wind shovelling the snow off the roof; our fire has warmed the caves. We've plenty of candles, that's a comfort."

Kerman lighted two as he spoke.

"I'm going to open the door again," said Kerman. "I fancy that was only a strong gust of wind, and we must have some wood in."

He opened the door. The snow came in again, but with much less force. Kerman went out. Half blinded he crawled to the wood-stack, which he had hitherto kept tolerably free from the snow. He dragged a few logs out and reappeared, white and shivering. His return changed the atmosphere of the hut. His breath was like smoke. He had not properly refastened the door. The wind banged it open, and a white column came whirling in. There was a snow storm on the very hearth. Decker dashed at the door and shut it. Neither of the men spoke for

some time. The wind howled. Kerman heaped the logs upon the fire.

"Let's drink old Father Christmas's health, Decker," said Kerman, presently, producing a bottle of brandy; "perhaps he'll like it, and not be so rough on us."

"All right, Jack."

"They'd call this seasonable weather in England."

"I wish it was next week, Jack."

"Why?"

"We shall be either dead or doing well next week."

"Here's to you, Father Christmas!" said Kerman; "and I hope you won't smother us with your seasonable attentions, most worthy monarch!"

"Good," said Decker, raising his glass. "Don't forget us, old Santa Claus. It doesn't look as if there were any inhabitants hereabouts; but there are, dear old boss, and if we get out of this, there will be no

end to the presents we'll make in your honour!"

Decker tossed off the contents of his glass. The wind came down the chimney and drove the smoke all over the place.

"Neither your Father Christmas nor my Santa Claus appears to care much about us, Jack," said Decker, "and it doesn't seem much good praying just at present. Nature's a curious institution, Kerman. It came into my mind this minute, the story of the parson, who, in a storm at sea, was told by the captain all had been done that was possible, and they must now trust in Providence. 'Mercy on us,' exclaimed the minister, 'and are we reduced to that?'"

"I don't think it's just the time, Tristy, to be humorous," said Kerman, as he commenced to nail a board over the window, which had long since ceased to exhibit any view to the eye except a blockade of snow.

"No, it isn't, but human nature is a

sassy critter, as my old colonel used to say. I remember falling into a rebel ambuscade in Virginia, and felt for certain my time was come, and the only thought that crossed my mind was a sense of satisfaction that I had at least lived long enough to thrash a bummer who used to worry me around when we were school-fellows. I have been pretty near the end of the street more than once or twice, Kerman; but I was never scared before now. If this weather keeps on for four-and-twenty hours we are gone coons!"

They sat and talked until dinner-time. They ate heartily, and drank hot grog. They talked of their lives—they talked of death. Kerman was foiled in his second attempt to bring in wood. A bank of snow seemed to fall upon him. The wind brought the snow in its arms, and flung it into the corner where the cabin was "perched." When the door was at last shut again, the snow drove in through the

crevice at the bottom. Kerman packed the crevice with a rug.

Night brought the two men face to face with death.

Kerman discovered that the roof nearest the mountain, which hitherto had seemed to protect them, was bulging and giving way. He made an effort to prop it. The wind had lifted a bank of snow from an adjacent ledge, and dropped it upon the hut. At midnight, in spite of every effort to prop it, two of the timbers fell in with a crash, burying the store-cupboard with snow, and extinguishing the lights. The snow seemed to come in with a thud, as if a dead body had been thrown in upon them. The fire leaped up as the candles were extinguished, showing the wreck in all its cold horror. The wind came in fierce and shrill through the roof with fresh accumulations of snow.

"If we stay here, Jack, we shall be buried alive," said Decker.

"We can't get out," Kerman replied, calmly; "the joists and jambs have settled down upon the door. A giant couldn't open it."

"There's the window," said Decker, in a hoarse whisper."

"And the snow grave beneath it," Kerman replied.

The Lincolnshire squire filled his pipe and sat down by the fire, which cast warm gleams upon the increasing bank of snow that was filling up one side of the hut.

"Can you smoke at such a time as this?" asked Decker, reprovingly.

"Yes; but it's all I can do."

"If the other part of the roof goes, it's all over with us."

"Yes, that would put my pipe out; but I don't think it will go. The fall at the back has relieved the top of half the weight of snow that rested on it.

As he spoke, a sudden moan was heard high up in the hills, and with it came a

crashing blow upon the cabin. It trembled and all in a moment there was no longer any fire, and Kerman found himself struggling beneath falling timbers and suffocating snow. With a tremendous effort he cleared his head of the weight that had borne him down. He could not see, but he could breathe. There was a voice as of thunder in his ears. He thought he heard the wreck of the cabin hurled down into the valley, and he wondered that he remained stationary. The snow fell upon his face. He was afraid to speak. The wind moaned. It seemed to pelt him with snow. He tried to move his arms—one of them was free. He rested it on the snow as a lever for his body. Fearful to move, he was nevertheless anxious to know if he could. He could not. When he tried to speak, his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. He moistened his lips with snow. Presently he called out, "Decker! Decker!"

It was like speaking in a vault. The sound of his voice seemed to come back upon him.

“Decker! Tristram Decker!” he cried.

The only answer was a dead, solemn, chilling, silence. Even the mockery of an echo was denied to the man. And the snow kept falling as if bent on burying him alive secretly. Some such thought occurred to the despairing victim of the storm.

“Decker!” he shouted, and with a desperate effort he freed both arms and flung them wildy upwards, as a drowning man in the sea.

Then the foundations of the earth seemed to give way, and he was carried down, down, into the lower darkness of the night, as if the wind had taken him into its arms to dash him headlong into eternity.

A sudden obstruction impeded their flight. All was still again, except the dull

moaning of the storm as it swept down the valley in a chill whirl of death, the snow following silently in its wake, to cover up and hide the horrors of Nature's grim and ruthless invasion.

CHAPTER IV.

“FACES IN THE FIRE.”

THE snow fell steadily upon Marylebone, upon Miss Weaver's Retreat in the great thoroughfare of the borough, and upon the business premises of Brayford & Co., Circularizers and Advertising Agents, in the once famous High Street of this division of the great city. But it melted nearly as quickly as it fell, converting the roads into soft, black mud, and making the pavements wet and greasy, as if the snow had been soot instead of white rain.

It was Christmas Day. The shops were closed, with the exception of the fruiterers and the confectioners, which were patron-

ized chiefly by shivering children, who ran to and fro with oranges and nuts, to the envy of other little ones, who, tucking their red arms underneath their grey pinafores, planted themselves in front of the tempting stores, and reckoned up what they hoped to buy on Boxing Day. Beneath the several archways of the locality a few men, some of them in their Sunday clothes, stood smoking in groups, now and then stamping their feet for warmth. The two or three bells in the adjacent church played a dirge-like invitation to prayer. In the stables of a local inn, an eccentric chanticleer persisted in continuing his somewhat tardy proclamations of the morn, as if he were anxious to make up for the lateness of his announcement by the vigour of his salutations. If you had listened to him, you would have been able to picture him in your mind, strutting back into his stable every now and then to shake his feathers free from the clammy

snow, and returning to his duty with renewed determination. A dirty mist settled down upon each end of the street, and through it, in a hoarse kind of tintinabulary whisper, came the sound of distant bells chiming and ringing, but the local “Bang-bang-bang” of the Marylebone bells sat heavily upon all competitors except Chanticleer, who deliberately waited to get in his cry between the pauses of the dull but emphatic call to prayers. The air was raw and dirty, for the smoke of the locality was more or less mixed up in the sluggish current of it that oscillated between the banks of mist that shut in the street, which was once the principal part of the village of Marylebone, with its Royal Palace, where Christmas had been wont to come hale and hearty with merry-making and wassail.

Almost in the centre of the street, over the back premises of Moses Aaron’s Emporium of Antiquities and China, Mr.

Harry Brayford had established himself in his new and somewhat mysterious line of business. To Mr. Aaron's emporium there were two entrances, one in front, another at the side, which a neighbouring furniture-broker had squeezed into the smallest possible dimensions. Moses Aaron, through the interposition of his wife, had consented to the side entrance being partially given up to Mr. Brayford, who was described upon the door in white letters as "Brayford & Co., Circularizers and Advertising Agents—Ring the bell on the right." If you had rung that particular bell, and been admitted into the narrow passage on this Christmas Day of our history, you might have been a spectator of an interesting scene. You would have been received by a tidy little Jewish girl, who would have shown you a set of white teeth, and said, "Yes, sir, Mr. Brayford is in, but he's just going to have his dinner. Second floor, first turn on the right." You would

have threaded your way through passages of antiquities and china, and past rooms choked with furniture, suits of armour, stuffed birds, old oak chests, oil paintings hung awry, and ancient swords leaning for support against matchlocks from the battle of Worcester, and battle-axes which had been wielded by Norman knights. Then you would have come to a blank space on the wall, with the direction, “Brayford & Co. —First door on the left.” Here you would have wiped your boots on a cocoa-nut mat, and knocked at a knocker with a demon’s head in bronze and wings of flaming brass, which bore evidence of daily polishing. Mr. Brayford was never tired of telling a certain infant, that would coo and laugh at him without understanding a word he said, all about this knocker. It had been on the chapter-house door of a famous cathedral, and every time it heard the clock strike twelve it had flapped its wings and raised the knocker itself. On this occa-

sion you would have lifted the brazen knocker yourself, and, in response to your summons, a cheery voice would have said, "Come in, if you're fat; if you're lean you'll do for the cat." Mr. Brayford was always ransacking his memory for some childish saying of his old days to please one or the other of his two children, as he called little Willie and the Wonner.

If you had elected to accept Mr. Brayford's nursery challenge on this Christmas Day, trusting to the plumpness of your anatomy, you would have seen a curious picture of London life. Mr. H. Brayford, in a faded velvet coat and pink slippers, was sitting at the head of a square table, playing the host to three other persons. Opposite to him, and with her back to a red glowing fire, was Mrs. Gardner, in a dark merino dress, with a white collar round her throat, her hair gathered up into a massive plait behind. Occupying another side of the table was little Willie,

propped up in a high child's-chair, and facing the Wonner, whose vacant eyes were fixed upon the Christmas pudding which his honoured though eccentric chief was about to carve.

"Second act, Mrs. Gardner," said Brayford; "that's what I call it, and a good act too; act three will be dessert and snap-dragon. Do you have snap-dragon in America?"

The host did not wait for an answer, but he handed a slice of pudding to the Wonner.

"For the lady, sir, for the lady," said the host, whereupon the Wonner blinked and smiled, and shuffled the plate in front of Mrs. Gardner.

"That's it," said Brayford; "ladies first, always, Mr. W., then the infants."

He cut up a slice into several pieces, and handed it to little Willie, who attacked it at once with a real silver spoon, lent for the purpose by Mrs. Aaron.

"Christmas comes but once a year," said Brayford, cutting another slice of pudding for the Wonner, "and when it comes it brings good cheer, roast beef and mince-pie, which nobody likes so well as I. There, Mr. W., bend your great mind upon that."

The Wonner looked at Mrs. Gardner, as much as to say, "Ain't he a humourist?" And then, nodding in a friendly way to little Willie, he commenced to pay attention to the pudding.

"If the sauce is not strong enough, have a little brandy to it—neat—Mrs. Gardner. Do, now; let me assist you."

"No, thank you; it is very good indeed," replied Mrs. Gardner.

"Extraordinary world this, madame," said Mr. Brayford, "is it not? Here is Mrs. Moses Aaron, who is a Jewess—Sarah Aaron is her name, Jerusalem is her nation, London is her dwelling-place, antiquities her vocation; and yet here she makes us a

Christian plum-pudding on the day that we malign her race, and she puts in the raisins and the lemon-peel as religiously as if she'd been brought up with a silver cross in her mouth, and had never heard of Judas Iscariot or Pontius his Pilate. Ah, Mrs. Gardner, we never know what the heart is by the religion it professes! I declare if I had a proper nose for the part I'd leave the Church and become a Jew. I'm in love with the whole fraternity."

Mrs. Gardner smiled, and by a look directed Mr. Brayford's attention to little Willie, who, as was his wont towards the conclusion of dinner, had leaned back in his chair and fallen asleep.

"Tired nature's sweet restorer," said Brayford, deprecating with his raised finger any other interference with the child but his own. "He, like the world, his ready visit pays where pudding paves the way."

Then he lifted little Willie carefully out of his chair, and handed him over to Mrs. Gardner, who carried the child into an adjacent room, and presently returned; while Mrs. Aaron herself came in, removed the pudding, and placed upon the table a decanter of port wine, a flask of brandy, a dish of almonds and raisins, and a plate of sliced oranges.

“Thank you, Mrs. Aaron; you are the kindest woman in the world,” said Brayford.

“Not a bit of it,” said the woman, “there’s many as is kinder.”

“To think that there should be persons calling themselves Christians who look down upon Jews! Why, these Aarons, bless you, have plenty of money. Mrs. A. has no need to wait on us, but she does it, I believe, out of pure kindness,” said the host, as Mrs. Aaron left the room, which she did as humbly as if she lived by letting the back premises, for far less than they

were worth, to her husband as warehouses.

“She is very good,” said Mrs. Gardner.

“And all because I was kind, she says, to her boy, who is dead; not that I knew him when living, but I built his last resting-place, and I sat and comforted the poor old lady on the day of the funeral, and felt sorry to see her grieving, and I wrote her a neat epitaph on my own principle, which I have explained before, only I did this in real earnest; and that’s how I came to have such comfortable premises for my new business, and there is no end to the dear soul’s gratitude. She has come to regard me at last as an old friend of her boy though my only acquaintance with him was through his coffin-plate and his grave-stone.”

The Wonner nodded and laughed.

“That’s right, Mr. W., enjoy yourself. Capital joke, wasn’t it?”

Mr. W. leaned back in his chair, with an

orange in one hand and an almond in the other, and chuckled immensely.

“It doesn’t matter to have a vacant head if your heart’s all right—ch, Mr. W.?”

“He is so clever,” said Mr. W. to himself, and laying down his almonds and orange to rub his hands.

“Now, Mrs. Gardner, one glass of port, madame, and I am going to give you a toast; fill your glass, Mr. W.”

“So very clever,” said Mr. W., pushing his glass towards Mr. Brayford.

“A merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to loved ones away and those who are here,” said Brayford; “more particularly referring, Mrs. Gardner, to Mr. John Kerman and to Mr. Tristram Decker, and to us four—yourself, and little Willie, and Brayford & Co.”

Then, as Mr. Brayford raised his glass to his lips, Mr. W. drank.

“Fancy the Wonner for a Company. Doesn’t it amuse you, madame? I often

laugh at the idea of it when I'm making out a bill—‘To forty thousand at one shilling a thousand, two pounds’; or, replying to an application—‘Please quote price for thirteen insertions, enclosed advertisement, Brayford & Co.’”

Mr. Brayford prided himself on being the inventor of what he called professional circularization. When Monolith Cottage and its business association came to an end, Mr. Brayford's principal trouble was the Wonner, and how that gentle imbecile was to live. The old pensioner had been in the habit of addressing circulars to the families of all the parties mentioned in the obituary advertisements of a morning paper, and the only established idea in the Wonner's mind was the absolute necessity to the world at large that he should continue in this occupation. When for a few days he was compelled to leave it off, he laboured under the belief that Brayford was playing some practical joke upon him.

The first day he pretended to enjoy it, the second day he resented it, and the third he broke into lamentations. Brayford having no use for Mr. W.'s labours in the old direction, conceived the idea of addressing others people's circulars, and thus sprang up a business which now provides many a humble home with food. Companies' prospectuses, tradesmen's circulars, pamphlets, all kinds of announcements, are folded, addressed, and stamped at so much per thousand, and Mr. Brayford's first ten shillings, after his downfall, were earned by himself and his ancient clerk from a city printer. Mr. W., however, still continued to address fifty envelopes per day from the obituary advertisements, which, after some trouble, Mr. Brayford had induced a once rival firm of mural masons to accept at a very low, though remunerative figure. It was while he was in search of Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson, in the hope of obtaining orders

to address his company prospectuses, that Mr. Brayford had come to the rescue of Mrs. Gardner and her child, whom he had brought to Mrs. Aaron, not, however, without some resistance on the part of the fugitive. When Mrs. Gardner had told her story to Mrs. Aaron, that childless old lady offered her a room, and with the business instinct of her race had remarked “there need be no obligation, for if the young woman can write a good hand, she may earn her living by addressing envelopes for Mr. Brayford”; and so it had come to pass that Mrs. Gardner and her child were inmates of the Emporium, the fugitive accepting the position of an assistant in the circularization department of the firm of Brayford & Co., who had recently added to their other responsibilities the business of an advertising agency, as notified in a leading journal—“Brayford & Co., High Street, Marylebone, insert advertisements and enter into con-

tracts for the same in all English newspapers; estimates given." He had demonstrated to Mr. Moses Aaron the advantages of advertising, by creating a run on cheap stuffed birds, through an announcement he had drawn up, with a poetic quotation in the middle of it and a surprising climax at the close, the spirit of which he presented "free, gratis, and for nothing" to professional dramatists. One of the Footlighters, who had been many times indebted to Brayford for a dinner, identified the address of Brayford & Co. and Moses Aaron, and in a so-called satirical journal, which was not entitled *Black Mail*, he congratulated Mr. Aaron upon the possession of a poet whose poverty, he heard, was sufficiently keen to qualify him for the divine afflatus said to come best to an empty stomach. The men who were under obligations to Brayford revenged themselves upon him most thoroughly; but as the author of the three-

act epitaph rarely saw them, or the elegant and refined journals under whose shadows they picked something more than holes in honest reputations, they did not much disturb the peace of mind of their former patron. Mr. Brayford was quite happy. He earned just enough to enable him to live, and give food and freedom to Mrs. Gardner and little Willie. These additional mouths to feed had not only brought him increased business, but Mrs. Gardner's history was to him a source of never-ending romance. He had discovered Mrs. Gardner's husband or betrayer in Tom Sleaford; he had shown her the corner house in Fitzroy Square; he had shown her Emily Sleaford's villa in St. John's Wood; he had shown her the West-End Bank of Deposit in Baker Street; he had told her their histories; and, on this Christmas Day, while Tristram Decker and John Kerman were in peril between the demon Gold and the despot Winter, Harry Brayford had

strange news to communicate to Mrs. Gardner, of especial interest to one if not both of these men whom we have just left at the mercy of the storm.

“You said you were going to church, Mr. W.,” remarked Brayford, when the white-haired clerk had signified that he had finished dining; “no snap-dragon until after tea, when little Willie’s awake.”

Mr. W. chuckled and rose to his feet. “Yes, yes,” he said, nodding, “always church at Christmas. He is so clever, so very clever.”

“Come straight back,” said Brayford.

“Yes, straight as I can; yes, yes,” replied Mr. W.

“Straight as you can? why, you’ve not had much port, you dear old sinner,” said Brayford. “Straight as you can! I’ll talk to you! There was an old gent of London, he thought his peace it was undone, so he went off to church, left his

friend in the lurch, and said that was the fashion of London.”

“Very good,” said Mr. W.; “clever and good, and so say all of us, Amen”; with which remark Mr. W. took a cloak and staff from a peg behind the door, and trotted out of the room.

“Now, Mrs. Gardner, you still promise to be guided by me, don’t you?”

“Yes, Mr. Brayford; you are as wise as you are kind.”

“No, don’t say that; rather that I am not quite such a fool as I look; I won’t pretend to go beyond that.”

“I can never thank you enough for all you have done for me.”

“Don’t thank me; I don’t deserve it; I have done nothing; but I want to tell you that I have come to the conclusion you were not married in London. None of the registry offices we have found are at all like the one you remember, and I have got it right fast in my mind that he never

brought you to town. He knew you were a stranger, and, either for the purpose of duping you, or for what reason it doesn't matter now, he has taken you to Bristol, Birmingham, Sheffield, Manchester, or some large city, and called it London. What do you think of that idea?"

"In a misty kind of fashion that thought has come into my head more than once."

"We are on the right track then at last," said Brayford, quickly. "The shadow of that idea falling on your mind is enough to convince me. That's settled. We will study the map, and visit the nearest large city. I don't know how we shall do it, but it must be done."

Brayford stirred the fire, and asked Mrs. Gardner to turn her chair round upon the hearth. The two then sat before the fire, Brayford on his side, Mrs. Gardner on hers. The so-called "gay dog," who had written comic songs, and sub-

scribed for an entire ballet company to have a Christmas dinner several years ago, was as respectful to the Southern woman as the humble subject of a queen might have been to his sovereign; and yet his homage was devoid of the ostentation of humility. Mrs. Gardner found him quite companionable. He exaggerated his age in order that even the wildest thought of suspicion anent the proprieties should make her feel uncomfortable. He might have spared himself any trouble on that account, for his good, true heart shone straight through his face, and illuminated all his conduct in Mrs. Gardner's eyes. She would never go out alone. Mrs. Aaron had been her companion here and there, in little shopping expeditions, but Mr. Brayford had shown her London in its splendour and in its rags, in its kindness and its cruelty. They had stood together outside theatres on grand nights; they had seen Hyde Park in the season; they

had been all through Marylebone Workhouse to look for an old man once in the employment of Brayford, who had procured him a situation as sub-porter at a cemetery; they had wandered through St. Giles's that they might see people worse off than themselves; they had stood opposite a large house in Baker Street, where Mrs. Gardner had clung to Brayford's arm in terror when he said, "That's his father's new swindle, the West-End Bank of Deposit; one day they will drag him out of that to gaol." She could never be induced to go into the Marylebone Road if she knew it. Her only fear in life was that Miss Weaver might have her seized and locked up, more especially as the police had issued a notice offering a reward for her discovery, in order to complete the prosecution of Irish Moll. Brayford told her that this official interest in her would soon be at an end, and he illustrated his views by stories of murders which had

excited London for a week or two, to be utterly forgotten for some new sensation. "London doesn't remember anything long, and it's astonishing how few murders they ever find out," he said. But Mrs. Gardner was firm in her fear of "The Retreat," and in her resolve never to go outside High Street alone, or allow little Willie to go beyond her immediate sight.

The winter twilight fell dark and dirty upon the back windows of the Emporium as Brayford and Mrs. Gardner sat talking by the fire.

"I've heard," said Brayford, "that Mr. Sleaford, *alias* Gardner, is visiting at Manor Farm, in the Marsh, Lincolnshire, and that Miss Crosby is at last likely to marry him. That makes me think the certificate you saw was a forgery."

"Oh, don't say that, for Willie's sake!" exclaimed the woman. "No, no, it's not true."

"Perhaps not. Don't let my bungling

fancies upset you, my dear madame. What I wanted to say is this: supposing that he should be about to marry Miss Crosby, it is our place to stop him. I had no idea he was in England, and I expect he has only just returned from the Continent, though I did think I saw him in Baker Street last week. I suppose there is no city in the world where people can be so thoroughly lost as in London, and the nearer you are to those who may be looking for you, the further you are off. Here you are under the very nose of Miss Weaver, close to Robinson's house, a stone's throw from the West-End Bank, and you are practically as far away as if you were on the other side of the Channel."

Mrs. Gardner was staring intently into the fire.

"She is in one of her dreaming fits," said Brayford to himself. "I had better go on talking, and not notice it."

"Do you ever see faces in the fire?" she asked.

"Well, no; I can't say that I do."

"Oh, Mr. Brayford," she said, "I am sure that something seriously affecting his life and mine is taking place while we sit here. I can see his face even while I speak."

She sighed deeply as she gazed into the glowing embers.

"Hark!" she exclaimed, in an earnest whisper, raising her hands, and bending her head to listen. "Did you hear nothing?"

"Well, no, my dear child, no," said Brayford.

"Didn't you hear that?"

"No, I really can't say I did."

"Not a voice saying 'Caroline, Caroline'?" she asked, rising to her feet.

"No, my poor child, no. Calm yourself; it is your fancy; you have had so much trouble, you see; you fancy these things."

“What will he say when he comes?” she asked, speaking more to herself than to Brayford, “when he comes and finds me? He will come, and my wicked heart longs for him. Oh, Christ, have mercy on one of thy most miserable creatures!”

“We will light the candles,” said Brayford, “and have tea. Mr. W. will be here, and we are going to have snap-dragon.”

He bustled about, lighted two candles, and commenced to clear away the remains of the Christmas dessert, calling Mrs. Aaron to his assistance.

“Mrs. Gardner is not quite well,” he said. “If you could persuade her to go downstairs and have a nice chat with you, I think it would do her good.”

Mrs. Aaron, taking the hint with kindly promptitude, went up to her lodger, and, putting a motherly arm about her, said, “Come and take tea with me, Mrs. Gardner. I’ve got a fresh lot of old

china and some curious old finger-rings just come in. I'd like to show them to you. Won't you come?"

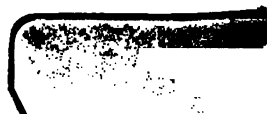
"I'll look after Master Willie," said Brayford. "Go with Mrs. Aaron; a little change will do you good, and when the snap-dragon's ready, and I and Mr. W. have brewed the elderberry wine punch, Mr. W. shall run down and tell you."

Mrs. Gardner leaned her head upon the good woman's shoulder, and suffered herself to be led away.

END OF VOL. II.

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